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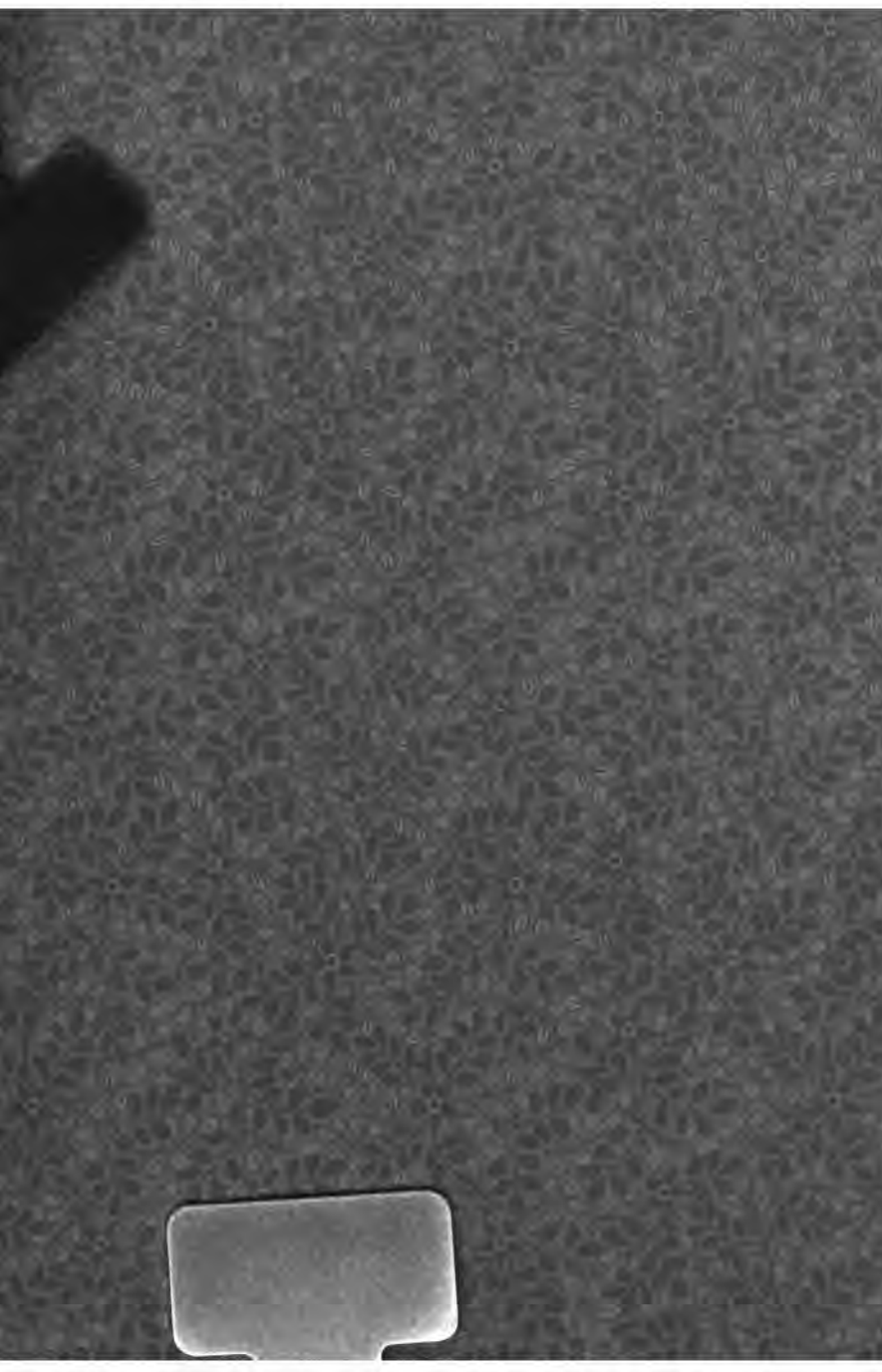
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A GOOD HATER.

BY

FREDERICK BOYLE,

AUTHOR OF

'CAMP NOTES,' 'LEGENDS OF MY BUNGALOW,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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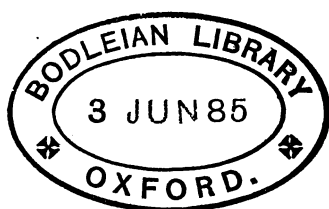
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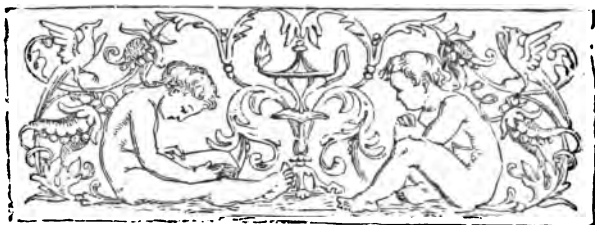


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A GOOD HATER.

CHAPTER I.

AT COOMASSIE.

‘H, I admit that the digression would be interesting! But it will cause a great loss of time, Hugh.’

‘The object of travel is—see formula.’

‘Yes, I know. But the journey we have undertaken had a very definite idea—for me, at least. To visit this legendary kingdom would take us far astray. It lies off the trade route.’

‘That’s the merit of it! What do you say, Robert Holmes?’

‘They tell me there are elephants there. I don’t hanker after kings much—seen too many of ’em, mostly beasts. But elephants fetch this subaltern.’

‘Well, I am not downright objecting,’ said Pringle. ‘But how about presents? You must recollect that this king is not a nigger.’

‘That’s what simplifies the question!’ Bob exclaimed. ‘We may drop the beads and the Brummagem to concentrate our minds upon brandy and fireworks. A damsel or two might be found gratifying.’

‘I think you are hard on the fellow,’ said Hugh. ‘He must have brains and spirit to have won his kingdom and to keep it between Ashanti and Dahomey.’

‘Well, he is probably not wiser than Solomon, nevertheless. But we will pre-

sent him with a telephone and a photographic apparatus, or an azimuth and a logarithm, if you like. Those articles might amuse the children, so far as they could be made to go.'

'Bar chaff, then, it is decided we visit Quantiah Kootlah before starting for Telaga?'

'Saving error in the report of elephants, it is.'

The three travellers were seated in an alcove which looked upon the main street of Coomassie the Golden. Evening approached. The nearer half of the roadway, thronged with people, lay in heavy shadow. Below the red houses opposite, a clamorous, eager crowd made a very kaleidoscope of colour, not brilliant of tone, but rich and massive. Every building had an alcove similar to that they occupied, a square opening in the house-wall, which was handsomely adorned with stucco bas-reliefs.

Two or three steps led up to it. Each was filled with people, draped in spotless cotton robes, with a coloured pattern, or in sombre silk. They sat upon the benches round, or leant over the mud parapet hidden by trailing stuffs. The theatrical effect was charming. Two or three feet below circulated the populace, idling, laughing, criticizing, exchanging news and gossip, or hurrying about their business. All ranks were there, from the field-slave, almost naked, black from exposure, to the great caboceer with his train of a hundred armed retainers, stalking beneath a huge umbrella, silk or velvet, golden-fringed, which a staggering servant held behind him. Women were there, glancing boldly, but not immodestly, at the spectators on either hand. Confidential slaves, busy and important, displayed their mistress's wealth in gold and beads. Preceded and followed by a guard, a silken litter urged its way towards

the palace. A herald went by with his gold plaque and wand of office, the clapper behind him, to call silence, and a rabble of naked children at his heels. Young nobles, gracefully dressed, crushed through the throng, their slaves clearing a road. Many a sharp cry of pain, many a biting jest and scandalous comment followed them. The Ashantis are an unruly people, and their King, like other despots, finds it necessary to bear free speech in his capital, if he would rule in peace.

‘Of course, we ought to be moving,’ said Hugh. ‘But for my own part I don’t tire of this scene. What infinite potentialities of romance are moving before us!’

‘Potentialities is a sort of word that appertains to Under-Secretaries of State, and Radical leader-writers. It sounds at once vaguely majestic and judicial.’

‘You know what I mean. There goes old Moumpoun to attend the King in state

array. He was a black Don Juan in his youth—so Coffee says—a second Cæsar in manhood, and a rival of Machiavelli in age. His career involves what I should call endless potentialities to dream over. We know all about our European Don Juans, and Cæsars, and Machiavellis, but how did that nigger emulate their good deeds?’

‘Well, in the first place, you don’t know that he did. And anyhow, there’s no mystery about it. The old scoundrel made love, made war, and now is making money, under the disguise of politics. Everybody does the same everywhere.’

‘Oh, you are hopelessly prosaic! No doubt his aims and objects are commonplace enough, but what were his adventures in pursuing them? They were not like any we know, or can easily imagine. Can’t you understand the potentialities, Bob?’

‘I suppose I can understand what you mean. But nigger heroes are duffers. Their

women aren't worth having, and their battles nobody heard of.'

'There I don't agree with you,' said Pringle. 'Everyone Moumpoun ever heard of knows all about his victories, and gives him honour for them. Did Napoleon have wider fame? And I don't doubt that people fall in love here much as they do in Europe. For that matter, there are pretty girls in Coomassie, Bob—heaps of them!'

'Excepting two or three in the King's harem, I've not seen any. And those came from the interior, of course. How can black women be pretty?'

'Oh, you are actually blind with prejudice, you dear old Bob! There isn't a black person in sight at this moment, unless it be a slave, sunburnt and unwashed.'

'This goes beyond potentialities, Hugh.'

'Well, look for yourself. I'll give you three minutes!'

'This is a useful warning,' said Pringle

meditatively. 'Bob is almost as intelligent as some people, but what a very misleading report he would give of the Ashantis after staying a fortnight at their capital!'

'Egad, you're right!' Holmes frankly exclaimed, after a moment. 'These niggers are yellow, and brown, and chocolate. What an odd thing! And, as you say, they're not ill-looking after a fashion.'

'Here comes our relief guard, and we must go in, I suppose. It's the prettiest part of the show when the lamps are lit, and the Mohawks go by with their torches. I don't believe there's any danger, really.'

The quick tropic night had fallen. On either side, up and down the vista, the alcoves began to gleam with lanterns and candles. The crowd was dispersing fast, for the hours of darkness have a special danger at Coomassie.

Half a dozen Houssa soldiers marched up in decent style, and grounded their rifles

before the house where Hugh and his friends were seated. The officer commanding saluted with a friendly grin, signalling the foreigners to go inside. They rose to obey, unwillingly. But at this moment a door in the house facing them burst open, and a crowd rushed forth, yelling, whirling torches. Though in disorder and crumpled, their robes were handsome, their bracelets and ornaments sparkled in the flare. All carried arms, and all showed those marks of yellow paint upon the forehead, which told they were 'out for the night.' It is a custom of Ashanti thus to warn peaceful citizens, when young blood sallies for a 'spree.' If an accident occurs when the precaution has been used, if people get hurt in a drunken broil, it lies with the complainant to show that he did his best to avoid collision, or that circumstances prevented him from noting the admonitory sign.

Tumultuously the throng ran out, some dozen young chiefs, followed by slaves and retainers. They perceived the Houssa guard, burly Moslems, standing quietly to arms. It may be believed that this new body of troops is not popular amongst Ashanti braves. They clustered round, with unkindly merriment. One who displayed more gold than any of his fellows—more drink also—roughly addressed the officer, who answered with respect. The chief seized a torch and waved it, looking into the alcove; his wet brow glistened, his large fierce eyes shone redly. Some offensive remark he bawled, which those around him chorused with rude laughter. And from the outskirts of the group a torch came hurtling, whizzing, discharging a train of sparks. It violently struck the inner wall, and rebounded.

That was the signal for a storm of missiles, harmless enough, pebbles and

refuse of the street. Amidst a din of laughter and invective, rang out the word of command, 'Fik barnta !' and the bayonets flashed. The roysterers drew their swords, and raised the war-cry; but they were not so drunk as to rush in disorder on the Houssa rifles. The street was alarmed. From back-courtyards to which the heads of families had mostly withdrawn, they hastily came forth, with arms and lights and slaves. The fray would have ended then, no doubt; the Mohawks would have retired to seek less perilous diversion. But a new incident caused respectable householders to vanish with extreme celerity. For a halo of ruddy light, a pillar of smoke, had been approaching unperceived. When the young chiefs looked round they saw the leading files of a small army within a hundred yards. Above the flame, looming through the smoke, rose a vast umbrella, like a tent in motion, its gold fringe glitter-

ing, its colours flashing and obscuring. They recognised it and ran, throwing away their torches. So did all those hastening to learn the purport of this disturbance. The alcoves, which had suddenly blazed again with lights and thronged with spectators, as suddenly fell into darkness. In two minutes the street was deserted.

Orderly and silently, with the rustling tread of many bare feet, the grandee's retinue marched past. Of five hundred men and over, it consisted. Swaying and gyrating the umbrella advanced, and stopped suddenly opposite the house. The captains cried, 'Halta !' and ran about with sticks. A lane was formed, and torch-bearers hastened to the front. Aloft, down the flaring avenue, a weazened potentate was borne, sitting in his armchair, supported on the heads of two gigantic negroes. A thin, imperious voice broke the dead stillness. The Houssa officer slipt his blanket

to his waist, and threw himself upon the ground. He spoke submissively, and the caboceer's bracelets clashed as he struck his hands together. The slaves carried him farther towards the alcove, his umbrella above him. The Englishmen drew to the parapet, bowed respectfully, and listened to a brief harangue. They had no interpreter; he, we may be sure, was trembling and perspiring in the darkest corner of the house. But the general purport of the speech was intelligible without his aid. The caboceer expressed regret and indignation, declared the incident should be inquired into, and wished the strangers good-night. They bowed once more, and he was carried back; the retainers closed in, the torch-bearers resumed their station, and with a muffled tramp the procession marched away down the silent street.

‘Positively, comparatively, superlatively superb!’ cried Hugh, as they sought the

inner yard. 'Did you remark the faces—the effects of light? It was worth a journey half across the world to feel that sensation!'

'At school I felt sensations dimly resembling it!'

'Resembling what?'

'Why, the sensation which an object, well delivered, will produce upon the human frame *en ricochet*.'

'I say,' said Bob, 'that caboceer was your friend of the potentialities, wasn't he?'

'Yes, old Moumpoun. I wonder what he said to us! Hi, Coffee, you nigger! Go catch them Houssa man one time! Tell them what them caboceer man tell when he tell! Oh, this Fanti pigeon-talk! How awfully clever people must be to understand one when one doesn't understand one's self. It would have been so much easier to teach the guileless negro plain English.'

‘Less poetical, I think, and less diverting. The object of travel is——’

‘I haven’t many jokes, and you can’t set up as a serious humourist upon my leavings, Pringle.—Well, Coffee?’

‘Caboceer man tell you hope your honour go at him to-morrow. Not wanted make trouble with them King, caboceer man fix it all serene. So happy!’

‘Very good!’ said Bob. ‘We will call on them caboceer, and spare them King our grievances.’

They sent to announce their visit early, for the hours of an Ashanti caboceer are almost as uncertain as those of an aristocrat in Europe. Moumpoun despatched in reply a number of officers and a guard of honour. The great general lives in a big house closing the end of the main street, which here turns right and left. Standing on a slope, it looks all down the avenue, a mile at least, beyond the market square, to

woods that mask the awful ditch of execution. Formerly, from this spot, one saw the Belvedere on the palace roof, above the trees ; that feature of the landscape vanished in an earthquake, a ponderous balloon of dust and smoke, when our troops retired, seven years before. In that general catastrophe Moumpoun's house escaped, being isolated, and at such a distance that the Kroomen did not linger to observe if their matches had fired it.

It is low, solidly built, heavily roofed with thatch. An arched portal on either wing leads to the interior court. Neither window nor door in the wall gives on the street, but there is a very large alcove commanding all the vista I have described. The whole façade is coated with stucco several inches deep, very hard and lustrous, Venetian red in colour. It is ornamented with bas-reliefs, bold and intricate of outline, like arabesques; but they represent

great battles and triumphant processions—an immense reserve of make-believe is needed for comprehension of the design.

Personages of rank occupied the alcove, recognised by their costumes and ornaments; they stood up respectfully, and bared their shoulders, with eyes downcast. One of the arched portals opened, showing a large courtyard, roofed along each face, but open in the middle. Though all the length of one wall was occupied by an enormous cooking-range, so to call it, many valuable and handsome objects hung on pegs, and the floor, where sheltered, was strewn with mats and cloths. Going on, the visitors traversed an inner court, surrounded by a colonnade, from pillar to pillar of which native curtains were jealously drawn. Beyond lay a similar court, but here the handsome draperies of silk were tied back, and servants, neatly robed, stood in double file all round. Moumpoun

sat opposite the entrance, in an armchair covered with leather, adorned with brass-headed nails as thick as they could be driven. Beside him, in a similar chair, sat a very dark young man, with a white cloth round his head, and a robe of tartan silk, which the strangers recognised as the royal colour. Two Arab chiefs, in large turbans, occupied lower seats. All the others present stood or squatted on the ground.

Moumpoun did not rise, but he smiled with majestic goodwill, and held out his hand to shake. So did the young man beside him, who, moreover, remarked in good English, quaintly emphasizing every word :

‘How do you do, gentlemen ? I have been away from Coomassie since your arrival, to my great regret.’

‘You are Prince Ekmo?’ asked Pringle.

‘Yes. These poor people call me Prince Cudjo Ekmo. I am a true friend of the

Englishman. I was educated at Sierra Leone, by my dear friend the late Bishop : *requiescat in pace !*

‘He must have been proud of his pupil,’ said Hugh.

‘Yes, he was proud. I have been to England also, but not much. Now, his Highness the Caboceer Moumpoun has something to say to you, gentlemen, which I shall be pleased to translate.’

Moumpoun then delivered a speech, which Ekmo interpreted sentence by sentence. He said :

“ The Ashanti nation is brave and honourable. Those who visit us with clean hearts are assured of welcome. Several English gentlemen have been here before and since our late king was betrayed into war with the invincible John Bull, and they have never known trouble. Last night, for the earliest time, visitors were insulted by a parcel of roughs. If his

Majesty the King hears this, his royal spirit will suffer damage. He will be very vexed. I beg, therefore" (says his Highness the Caboceer Moumpoun), "that you will not complain to his Majesty. If my own son was guilty of the offence he shall be punished severely. This I promise on my strong oath. Furthermore, if the English gentlemen will be led to my way of thinking, I offer them gratitude."

'This is what his Highness observes,' continued Ekmo. 'Your honours are probably not unsuspicious that his son, Quamina Arkom, ringleaded the proceedings last night. His Highness has not spoken privily. These men round hear what he says. He desires, in his way, to apologize, as we call it, for Quamina Arkom. What say you, gentlemen?'

'We say,' Bob cried, 'that there is no occasion for such a fuss. We aren't hurt!'

The Ashanti prince did not like this

careless tone—his face betrayed him. But Pringle and Hugh expressed themselves more diplomatically, and Ekmo recovered his composure. It amused them to observe how he sustained the royal dignity, though his education and his travels told him that the Englishmen must be laughing in their hearts. No doubt he translated their courteous words with many a fanciful addition. Moumpoun grimly beamed upon them with a benevolence quite touching.

Then they talked of other things, whilst girl-slaves handed coffee. This hospitable ceremony was performed in the Arab style. The cups, indeed, were little calabashes, bound in gold ; the filigree stands, of ruder workmanship than they produce along the coast, were native ; the coffee was wild and bitter ; the napkins of home-spun silk, only four inches wide. But the mode of service was precisely imitated from the Arab, and the trays were enamelled copper

brought from Egypt. All round, in fact, Arab influence displayed itself. Saphis dangled overhead; Moumpoun was dressed in Arab style, saving that his turban had not the dimensions fashionable with true believers on this coast, and that he declined wearing trousers.

Whilst sipping coffee, the travellers mentioned their design of visiting Quantiah Kootlah. Ekmo was startled.

‘May I beg to ask if you came to my country with that design?’

‘No. Our object, so far as we had any beside amusement, was to explore Telaga.’

‘Ah, Telaga! A very interesting realm. These Arab gentlemen have just gone through it. They will give you much information.’

‘We only heard of Quantiah Kootlah on the journey up,’ said Hugh. ‘A visit to his territory will not take us much out of the way.’

‘You may leave me to calculate this, gentlemen,’ said Ekmo. ‘It is an unheard-of thought. His Majesty must ponder.’

‘Is he really white?’ asked Bob.

‘Yes, Quantiah Kootlah is white. I will tell nothing more at present. We must think.’

Moumpoun asked what was in dispute, and all those who had authority to speak in his presence eagerly discussed Prince Ekmo’s reply. After a time the visitors prepared to leave.

‘I want to ask one question, Prince,’ said Bob. ‘Are there elephants in Quantiah Kootlah’s country?’

‘I have heard it. They are very dangerous animals. You may grant me the honour to expect a call this evening, gentlemen.’

As soon as they reached home, the interpreter Coffee was summoned, to repeat the opinions expressed by Moumpoun and his chiefs upon their project. He said that all

the retainers opposed it. Quantiah Kootlah was an enemy of Ashanti, and what advantage could come of allowing Englishmen to visit him? The Arabs argued fiercely that it was news of the late check the Ashanti King had received in his invasion of Quantiah's country which had brought these strangers to Coomassie.

'They think,' said Coffee, laughing, 'gentlemen bring trade from sea, bad business for them!'

But Moumpoun asked impatiently what harm the English would do, when they did not care to keep Coomassie the Golden, after taking it? Ekmo held the same view. He said, by Coffee's report:

'Don't hurry no man's cattle. I talk to them King. We make business—yes, perhaps so, outside them circumstance.'

That the Ashantis had lately sent an expedition against the white chief was news. Coffee was charged to learn all he could

about it, and before evening further particulars came to hand. The invading force had been commanded by Quamina Arkom, eldest son of Moumpoun, and their assailant of the night before. That young chief conducted the operations very skilfully and secretly, surprised Manfi, the principal town, and narrowly missed capturing Quantiah Kootlah himself. But the expedition did not end so successfully. The King recollected his troops, destroyed several marauding parties, and besieged the Ashantis in Manfi. They cut their way out finally, but with very serious loss. All the plunder was re-captured, and all the slaves, excepting Quantiah Kootlah's two children, who at this time were resident in Moumpoun's harem.

Whilst they still chatted over this rather disconcerting intelligence, Ekmo came in state, with his pages and body-guard. After the usual greetings, he broached the subject in which they were interested.

‘I know,’ he said, ‘that your honours just wish to talk to the white caboceer. What business would you make with him? I understand all that, but our poor people are suspecting. You are fixed to go?’

‘Quite fixed,’ said Bob.

‘If his Majesty does not decidedly object,’ Pringle added.

‘Our poor people tell me they have been good to you on the whole. The King gave strict orders. And Quamina Arkom has fled to the bush.’

‘His Majesty and everyone has been most kind.’

‘Then, if you go to Manfi, you will give returns, is it not? The King is very vexed and disappointed with Quantiah Kootlah. He prepares to crush him at this very time. But the royal heart loves friendship more than war. If Quantiah Kootlah will cease to do wickedness, and learn to do well, he shall be made a great caboceer. In council

he shall be high placed, and he shall command 10,000. That his Majesty promises on the royal word. And your humble servant will make much of him, for I love the white man. Will your honours endeavour persuading Quantiah Kootlah? I tell you by my strong oath, as these poor people say, that if he not accepts he is dead, or no better.'

'We will carry the message willingly,' said Pringle, 'if your people and his will let us through.'

'No fear of that. You will fly the Union Jack—no fear at all. You will tell him that a second-rate caboceer of Ashanti, with his own men, took his metropolis and burnt it. How, then, if the King goes to fight?'

'Your Highness, in fact, wishes us to travel as ambassadors of Ashanti?'

'Yes. Then you go through safe, with the royal heralds and the Union Jack.'

‘This becomes a more serious business,’ Pringle observed. ‘You will let us consult. Meantime, pray tell us who is Quantiah Kootlah, and how he became a king?’

‘He is not a king. I will explain to your honours. Quantiah Kootlah was a clerk in the office of Charpey and Simmons, at Cape Coast. There was war one time between the King of Abra and other Fanti caboceers, and the road was stopped. Ashanti traders could not come and go. Just now the head merchant of Charpey and Simmons’s office died, and Kootlah made business. He got vexed because the road was stopped. So he told Ashanti traders waiting at Cape Coast, and with them, some others too, he made a run, beat the King of Abra, and killed him. He took many goods to Prahsu and made great profit; but there was trouble with the government. Then Kootlah came up to our place, and his

Majesty, the uncle of his present Majesty, who was then on the throne, made much of him. They were very affectionate. He fixed Kootlah as grand caboceer, and sent him to take care of Manfi. Things went well there. Much money and trade came from Manfi. Then, after years, we made unhappy troubles with England. His Majesty Koffee Kallalli was then reigning. Kootlah knew nought of the troubles, for he was fighting Dahomey, taking many goods, which he sent to the King. So his Majesty did not call him to fight in that unhappy circumstances.

‘ When the English had gone away things were bad. Many chiefs revolutionized; Ashanti was left entirely naked. Quantiah Kootlah showed himself of a bad heart; he revolutionized too. But one after one we have conquered those rebels, and brought them back repenting or dead. He only stands against us. And if he not makes

this business with your honours, surely he shall be destroyed, he and all his people. But if he will listen, he shall be very happy.'

'Do you know his real name?' asked Bob.

'I think it is indeed Kootlah—C-u-t-l-e-r. I have never seen him, for I was at school. He is an Englishman, but bad.'

'Don't you think,' Hugh observed, 'that if we took with us the children whom Quamina Arkom captured, it would have a good effect?'

'That has been talked of in council. You shall have the children. And his Majesty gives you——'

'I think you are all going much too fast,' said Pringle. 'Our only object is curiosity and sport. A diplomatic mission is not at all in our way; and if it comes to taking charge of two babies, I, for one, propose to abandon the idea entirely.'

‘They are not babies, sir. The boy is eight years of age, I estimate, and the girl twelve. You saw them to-day at his Highness the caboceer’s house.’

‘They were two pretty fair children?’ cried Bob eagerly. ‘I think it is our duty, Pringle, to rescue such jolly little creatures if we can—half English, too!’

‘There is something in that. Subject to reflection, Prince, I should like to hear what his Majesty proposes.’

‘He gives you 200 soldiers of his Houssa guard, and 500 slaves to carry—our poor people call them slaves. It is, as you would say, labouring men.’

‘Oh, upon my soul, Prince!’ Bob exclaimed, ‘I suppose it is your labouring men who volunteer to have their heads cut off at the Customs?——’

‘It is painful, sir——’

‘Very much so for the labouring men!’

‘I say, sir, that this business is painful.

I have lived with white men, and I understand what they think. I have explained all that to his Majesty, and he understands just now. But there is business even in England which you cannot make, because the people are ignorant. Not all one time. I say, Mr. Boobah, it is not gentlemanly to spoil talk with supercilious remarks of national fancy.'

'I apologize, Prince,' said Bob gravely. 'You know Englishmen so well that you can excuse my thoughtlessness. We are frank, but well-meaning, like Ashantis.'

'So be it, sir. I have forgotten the circumstance. Your honours are going to dine? I realize a smell of Irish stew, which was gratifying formerly.'

His Highness stopped to taste it, of course, and to drink a handsome share from the cherished bottles. When he left, the proposals of the Ashanti King were even more liberal than first offered. His envoy

doubled the guards, the carriers, promised a 'dash' of a thousand ounces, and begged the Englishmen to stop and share his kingdom. In the course of the evening they resolved to see this business through, and to start so soon as their escort was ready.



CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE CABOCEER.

‘**T**HIS is pleasant!’

‘My dear Hugh! The happiest illustrations of irony lose their point when circumstances are too downright for oblique reference. I prefer to say what I mean in plain English. Our situation is beastly——’

‘What’s that? A tarantula, by the fiend! He’s gone your way! I shall follow Bob’s example. It can’t be more wretched outside!’

‘An invasion of tarantulas settles the question. I’m with you.’

They left the soddened hut which made their quarters for the night, carrying lanterns. Rain fell on their heads with a weight as of buckets tilted, hissing and roaring like a cataract, between dread bursts of thunder. A blue glare of lightning hung over the spot, and quivered, scarcely pausing. As in unnatural daylight through a blurred but translucent glass, they saw the roof of leaves, the broken walls, the brushwood beaten down and crushed, the tall trunks draped with parasites, the tendrils hanging like cordage of a wreck. Then a deeper darkness fell for the space of a pulse-beat. The earth seemed moving, inches deep in water; the forest howled, and flamed again.

‘Bob! where are you?’ Pringle shouted, above the clamour.

‘Here! Looking at you! Come round the tree!’

In the next burst of darkness they ob-

served a shrouded glow, traced it, and discovered Bob, sitting, almost dry, between the buttresses of a cotton-tree. Behind him young Juma was faintly outlined, blowing at a miserable fire.

‘You monster of selfishness! Who built this palatial abode?’

‘I say, there isn’t room for a squadron. The children made this shelter for themselves, not for a crowd of grown-up ruffians.’

‘Clever little kids! Let us throw a tent over the roof, and enlarge their dolls’ house.’

Not a slave nor a soldier answered to their shouts. These also had found a refuge from the storm, and they would turn out for no master who dared not take their heads off. The young men found a tent, unpacked it, laboriously stretched it from wall to wall of the buttress-hut, and pegged it down. Beyond reach of the deluge with-

out, they could light their pipes, strip off their dripping clothes, and enjoy a Turkish bath, muffled in waterproof.

‘I say, officer of the night,’ Hugh began, ‘isn’t it advisable to make your rounds? I don’t expect there’s a single sentry at his post.’

‘Oh, we run no danger,’ said Bob. ‘Let the poor devils shelter if they can.’

‘We crossed the frontier to-day, and until old Kootlah communicates we should take precautions as in an enemy’s country. Besides, the amount of danger is no consideration for the officer of the night. Let him do his duty. I believe it rains. I have reason to think there is mud in the neighbourhood. When I was on duty last night it didn’t rain, and there was no mud ; but I behaved like a man. Captain Pringle, emulate your comrade.’

‘I don’t want any spurring, Mr. Acland. The hour approaches, and the man is ready.

It strikes me there'll be a parade for punishment to-morrow. It's odd, by the way, that old Kootlah has not answered our messenger yet.'

'Perhaps he's preparing a swell embassy.'

'Perhaps he's coming to meet us.'

'That's the real solution, gentlemen!' said a strange voice from the darkness.

They all sprang up ; but two soft-skinned creatures burst through them, with inarticulate screams of delight. A sound arose of hugging and kissing, and broken, joyous exclamations. The lanterns, hastily turned outwards, showed a tall man bent over the children. His white hair fell in dripping tangles over their crisp heads. Behind, in dusky shadow, stood a score of negroes.

With an arm about the neck of each small captive, which they held and fondled, the stranger advanced :

'Under any circumstances, you would have been welcome, but I thank you from

my heart for restoring these foolish little savages. May I come in?’

‘Certainly!’ they exclaimed, making way.

One of the attendants began to blow the fire.

‘The officer of the night will perhaps explain this intrusion, agreeable but irregular,’ murmured Hugh.

‘You are Quantiah Kootlah?’ asked Pringle.

‘Yes. I have been waiting three days at my frontier village, intending to present myself formally. But when this storm interrupted your march, and my scouts told me that the camp was unguarded, I could not resist a paltry little impulse of astonishing the Ashanti.’

‘If the officer of the night——’

‘Oh, shut up, Hugh!’

‘As the rain is ceasing, I suggest that you come over to my quarters, which are but a mile or so farther on. The road is

not very difficult, and you will have a comfortable night's rest. It would be droll if the Houssas found you spirited away to-morrow morning.'

'Suppose they loot our property and turn back in panic?'

'I will take care of that. What say you?'

Of course they assented, and silently filed off into the darkness, shading their lanterns. A sturdy negro marched beside each of them, and another behind; no useless attendant, for the mud was slippery as ice to booted men, and the path full of roots. Quantiah Kootlah went ahead, carrying his little girl, whilst her brother followed at his heels holding on to his robe. All three chattered without ceasing. At some distance beyond the outer line which sentries should have occupied, they drew out their lanterns, travelling became easier, and in an hour's time they reached the village. Outpost duty was no fair-weather business

in Quantiah Kootlah's army. Again and again they were challenged. With some natural jealousy, Pringle expressed his astonishment that an enemy should have surprised the chief town when a mere camp was so well guarded.

'Ah, that is a story,' said Quantiah Kootlah. 'Here we are, gentlemen.'

There was no need of warning. The rain had stopped, the clouds were rolling away. In that instant a deluge of moonlight burst over the scene. They had left the forest. On either side the track lay an expanse of broad, silky leaves, smoothly stretched, or rolled perpendicularly; the moonbeams silvered their wet edges. Delicately they lay spread, tremulous, softly broken, like wavelets in a dim green sea, as far as the mighty forest verge. It was a plantain orchard of one year's growth: the old trees had been levelled, doubtless, by Ashanti raiders.

Low and grey, vague but faintly luminous, the village wall traversed it, an uninterrupted line of houses, pierced for musketry, but windowless. The pale soaked roofs glistened above, the abattis sparkled below, hung with rain-drops. As they drew nearer, a gate opened, between flanking redoubts, and soldiers lined the approach. Naked they were, saving the breech-cloth, the belt, and cartridge-box; but they marched fairly well, took their intervals without chattering or confusion. Their arms and their polished skins shone in the moonlight.

Quantiah Kootlah set down his little girl, and smilingly begged the travellers to close in. Half a dozen of his body-guard pressed forward simultaneously, so that the children walked unseen. The soldiers presented arms, they entered the gateway, turned to the left along a curtain wall, loopholed, and suddenly found themselves beneath the

shadow of a great tree, the African caoutchouc. It stood in the middle of the roadway, upon high-shouldered roots, which made a natural seat all round. Beyond its heavy mass lay the village street, one side white in moonbeams, the shadow on the other red in a flare of torches borne to and fro. Many hundreds of soldiers and townspeople were there, thronging in picturesque excitement. They all fell back, as the King's party came into view, and stood beneath the huts in an attitude of respect. Here and there the lights concentrated in a sheaf of smoky flame, which showed the mouth of a pitch-black alley, crowded with people. The dark faces and white eyes, the smooth shoulders redly gleaming, the stalwart forms of the men, and the shapely girl-figures half withdrawn behind them, made a picture delightful to observe.

At fifty yards' distance stood another tree, beneath which was drawn a company

of soldiers, in clean grey baft with blue facings, and belts covered with leopard-skin. Picked men were these, of unusual height. The officer in command, who stood under his umbrella, was a giant, and the subalterns almost rivalled him. They had the fairer skin and more graceful features of the negroid, but their chief was as black as man can be. He showed much excitement. The point of his sword made little coruscations and sparkling circlets in the air, so violently his hand shook. As they passed opposite his station Quantiah Kootlah stepped forward, and the children sprang to the front.

At that revelation, the giant officer made one bound—his sword flew this way, his cap the other. He threw himself upon the earth, laughing and crying, clasped their little feet and rubbed his head against them, sprang up, and danced and howled. The soldiers also, forgetting discipline in their

colonel's frenzy, broke rank and fell into maniacal contortions of delight. It was pretty to observe the behaviour of the children, how they laughed, with tears running down, patting now this man and now that, calling him by his name, appealing to their father. Quantiah Kootlah's face glowed. Hugh felt a sob in his throat. Bob Holmes whimpered; and the judicious Pringle said:

‘This is really affecting! Who would have thought it!’

All the people of the village were soon crowding round; the noise and disorder, heat and smell, became annoying. The King raised his hand, and a dozen clappers vigorously swung, overpowered the din. In dead silence, then, Quantiah Kootlah spoke a few words, and every eye was fixed upon the Englishmen with gratitude that could be read. The people answered in sharp cries. ‘Fall-in-a, men—fall-in-a!’ commanded the giant officer. They obeyed, and

marching in advance, turned up a broad street to the left, and halted at a portal much handsomer than those around. Beneath the coating of stucco, it was probably a square doorway; but its mud arch, of the Moorish style, was graceful and fantastic, its columns were painted, the walls displayed a system of decoration in relief quite imposing under the moonbeams. A number of slaves stood round, who prostrated themselves, and led the way indoors.

I need not describe the architecture of his little palace, which was built on the Ashanti model, with courtyards leading one into another, and alcoves all round them. Arab influence showed even more strong than in Coomassie. All the courts were lit with candles of great size, in candelabra quaintly carved and painted.

Quantiah Kootlah led his visitors to a small side court.

‘ You will find dry clothes, and a bath in

the recess,' he said. 'For this one night, I fear you will be obliged to dress in native style. There are slaves waiting outside, but I hope all your wants are provided for. Supper will be ready in half an hour.'

When he had gone the travellers looked at one another.

'Well, I'm blowed!' said Bob impressively.

Hugh turned it over in his mind, found no expression more appropriate, and added 'So am I!'

Pringle frowned, pondered, and accepted the formula.

'I am blowed, thou art blowed, he is blowed! Let us say no more about it, but get dressed.'

They had long since appreciated the cool and graceful fashions of the land for indoor use. The Ashanti robe is only a sheet, rather stiff, of cotton generally, with most

elegant devices in blue or red. The under-cloth, rarely seen, may be extravagant of material or trimming ; and the scarf is generally silk, if the wearer claim any position. But the outer garment is invariably plain. Very beautiful it is, nevertheless. No one who has the means to buy native stuffs, or has slaves to make them, will wear European silks or cottons, vastly cheaper but beneath comparison in every respect. The draping of the robe is an art which Ashanti gentlemen carry to the utmost pitch of grace.

When they were ready the slaves led them to a larger court, more highly ornamented and more handsomely lit. A number of chiefs and officers stood round it, the giant colonel towering over all. The King received them formally, and gave them chairs covered with leather, studded with brass nails, such as are appropriated to great caboceers. There was even a table,

rudely but effectively carved in some black wood, with plaques of gold at intervals.

A clear view of their host did not, frankly, prepossess them in his favour. The white chief's skin was evidently very fair beneath its many coats of sunburning, and the features had been handsome. They were thickened now and suffused; the large eyes were bloodshot, the lips relaxed, though the expression of the jaw was hard almost to ferocity. The type is not uncommon amongst those who live recklessly in constant danger; so frequent, indeed, that one may suppose it correlative with the disposition or the qualities that lead a man into such conditions of existence. Pringle's experience brought him to a conclusion on the spot.

'A drunkard,' said he to himself; but further observation shook the idea.

The younger travellers did not suspect this, but they felt disappointment. On the

converted to some sort of creed in no long time, the choice lies between that and Christianity; and to you, who are not missionaries, I judge, I venture to say that for their happiness and success in this world the Mahommedan dogma would be far the most suitable. As for the other world, not knowing anything about it, I am not able to give an opinion.'

'Have you ever felt inclined to turn Mussulman yourself, King?' Pringle asked.

'I had no object. On the contrary, any Mussulman who enters my realm without a safe-conduct loses his head.'

'And how would you treat a Christian? That is rather an interesting question for us.'

'If you were missionaries, I would send you back; and if you persisted I'd take off your heads, by Jupiter!—with extreme regret, of course.'

Pringle looked grave, and to turn the conversation,

‘Pardon the remark, King,’ said Holmes.
‘You have kept up your English wonderfully, after so many years in the bush.’

‘I try to do so. I talk English to my children, though they don’t understand much.’

‘Perhaps they won’t try with you. We got along with them quite easily. Bob, who is their special favourite, used even to tell them stories.’

‘They have gratefully reported all your kindness, gentlemen! I want words to thank you!’

‘Pray don’t dwell upon it! May I ask if their mother is alive?’

‘She has been dead some years.’

‘And do you never think of returning to civilization?’

‘The idea gets hold of me strongly sometimes. If I could have transported gold enough to make a decent excuse for twenty years’ residence in the bush, I should pro-

bably have yielded before this. But Ashanti blocks the way.'

'Is there no other road to the coast?'

'Yes, several. I have visited both Whydah and Cape Coast Castle. But we could not take heavy baggage.'

'Then we may understand you have made your fortune, King?' laughed Bob. 'If the hostilities with Ashanti alone forbid you to realize it, we are commissioned to remove that difficulty.'

'I know. And a very few hours since I had made up my mind to give you an emphatic negative. But the sight of English faces, the sound of English talk, have almost undecided me.'

'It would be a shame to let those jolly little kids grow up as savages,' said Bob.

'That is no consideration with me,' the King answered, smiling. 'I rather agree with the opinion of that hero—what was his name?—that Tennyson wrote about.'

“Locksley Hall!” Hugh said; ‘but you have rather forgotten the argument.’

‘And you, my boy,’ laughed Pringle, ‘have rather forgotten the facts. Then, King, after such experience as few men have enjoyed, you think that a savage life is comparable for happiness with a civilized?’

‘No! For I believe that if all classes and characters are taken together, the savage enjoys such a vastly higher average of happiness that there can be no comparison. But for persons of intelligence his life wants interest. Now, my boy will be a king, a fighting king, a conqueror, I hope. He will certainly be busy, with a thousand cares, excitements, hopes, alarms, ambitions, intrigues, triumphs, and disappointments. Would any position he could expect to reach in Europe bring such keen interest? I would say more than that! Is there a

king in Europe at this day who has my responsibilities, my dangers, and my delights? Unless the world has changed a good deal since my time, there is none. And that is the life which brings a man happiness! No! If I considered Juma I would never return!’

They were silent. Upon the journey Pringle had ascertained that these young folks had no ideas of religion beyond a vague but amiable form of Deism. But that matter could not be broached, evidently.

Bob observed:

‘What you say may be true for Juma. But little Yini? Her existence will not be very grand, nor very interesting, in the harem of a negro king, with a thousand comrades.’

‘There you hit me! It would be hard to part with my darling girl just now, after so many months of distress; but if an

opportunity arose to-night for sending her to England, I would snatch at it.'

'How do you reconcile that feeling with the belief that your subjects don't want any religion, and that Islam is the best for them anyway?' Pringle asked.

'The two ideas are not to be reconciled,' said the King. 'Old prejudices interfere. My head tells me that Yini would be at least as happy, or would run as good chance of happiness, in the harem of such a man as I should choose for her as in an English home, with the parson to advise her in things spiritual, a drawing-master, a piano, and a worthy young stockbroker to make decorous love on Sundays after church. But no man can throw off the influence of early training. That unreasonable sentiment struggles with mere knowledge and gets the best of it.'

'Perhaps because the sentiment might be called an instinct,' said Pringle.

‘I have no objection. Instinct is inherited prudence, which teaches us the best course under circumstances that have been growing up for generations. I have one set of instincts; my subjects have another. Since they are so much less removed from the natural state of man, I conclude that their instincts are more natural.’

‘You are fond of an argument, I think,’ said Pringle, brightening up. ‘This is one of the most astounding propositions I ever heard! If your subjects are less removed from the natural man than you, that means that they are nearer the brutes. And you are content to be ruled by the animal instincts?’

‘We are discussing Yini’s happiness, not my inclinations. Her instincts at present are those of the people round her. For the rest, in dealing with men and women, the only common impulses on which you can rely are those which come to them from the

animal. Go upon these, and you will never make a mistake, unless by an error of knowledge or calculation. I speak,' he added, smiling, 'with some experience, gained at the risk of my life, and you may depend upon my words. When a ruler takes account of fancies and characters, or allows his own character play, he is on the wrong track—but as for argument, I think I always hated it, and certainly I am not equal to it now. May I ask what your projects are?'

'We are deviously journeying towards Telaga, the mythical city, of which perhaps you can tell us something at your leisure. Upon our way up, we heard of the white King of Manfi, in whose realm are elephants. And we turned aside.'

'Are there really elephants in your country?' asked Bob.

'Many, and I make you free of all game-laws. Negro potentates have game-laws, I

assure you, though in my peculiar case they are not required, and therefore I have not made any myself. We may start for Manfi to-morrow afternoon, if you like, when I have brought up your baggage, and settled the Houssas comfortably. It would be best, if you do not object, that they return to Molikassi, on the Ashanti frontier, and await you there.'

'Our disappearance has been found out, I suppose? What a row must be going on in camp!'

'So my scouts report. I have sent a message to quiet the Houssas. We will go to them first thing to-morrow, and we must be early, if you please, or our droll adventure may end in a fight. You will find a nightcap in your quarters. Good-night!'

The King withdrew, mounting the steps of an alcove curtained with silk; an outburst of joy told that his children were still

awake. In their own courtyard the travellers found a calabash, gold-mounted, full of rum, and three gold-rimmed cups. For an hour they sat exchanging views upon the situation, which I need not repeat; but their opinions about the King should be cited.

‘He’s a gentleman by training, though an odd one,’ said Bob, ‘that’s clear enough! His adventures will be worth hearing.’

‘Not the man for confidences, I should think,’ Hugh observed. ‘Did you remark that he never uttered a word of cant, as these sort of fellows do—nothing about his duty or his mission? I like him for that.’

‘Have you met many of this sort of fellow?’

‘A good many—in books.’

‘Books! People who write describe men by the looking-glass!’

‘I fancy,’ said Pringle, ‘that he doesn’t talk about his mission because the idea of one has never entered his head. You would

hardly expect cant from a man who lets his children grow up little heathens, and is prepared to cut missionaries' heads off.'

'Well,' said Hugh, 'the King's a fine fellow though he's not orthodox. His subjects worship him evidently, and I imagine that's no bad testimony to character.'

'Christian virtues are not indispensable to a good negro monarch, I suppose,' said Bob. 'It seems to me that our friend distinguishes rather carefully between his official conduct and his private ideas. Talking as a king he's dignified enough, but I suppose other potentates allow themselves a private opinion about private matters. I haven't any experience, but it seems likely.'

'My belief is,' Pringle summed up, 'that this man has been so peculiarly lucky as to fall into that exact situation where his best qualities come to the front. Quantiah Kootlah is a hero, but I should fear that

Mr. Cutler may have left memories not agreeable at home.'

Before dawn their clothes were brought, and the King awaited them in the outer courtyard.

'If you have fallen into native vices, here is toddy fresh drawn, as sparkling and almost as harmless as soda-water; or, if you prefer it, wild coffee.'

They set out for last night's camp, preceded by the body-guard, who were distinguished by stature and by belts covered with leopard-skin. The rest of the troops had been keeping watch all night in the jungle to resist any hostile movement of the Houssas. The tumult and excitement reigning in camp were audible at some distance. The position of these Ashanti mercenaries was terrible, if anything had happened to the white men in their charge; and loud were the cries of joy when sentries rushing in announced their ap-

proach. Officers hurried to meet them, pale under their black skins, quivering with excitement. The communication they made roused Quantiah Kootlah to fury, repressed but dangerous. He gave orders to his chiefs about, who prostrated themselves and ran.

‘Your people have vanished,’ he said, ‘after rifling your goods. If they have gone back by the Coomassie road they are dead men by this time, for the Houssas sent their swiftest runners in pursuit soon after midnight. But I fear the scoundrels were not so ill-advised as to take that road. There is another which would serve their purpose as well, though more difficult, running through the Obiye country to the Volta. But then, how should Fantis know it? The Houssas are mustering your slaves. We shall see.’

In rank across the narrow space the carriers paraded, and their head-man called

the roll. One was missing, a driver, an Obiye Fanti.

‘That explains it,’ said the King. ‘If he knows the country well, I fear your property is lost. They have a long start. Let us see what is missing.’

Things might have been worse. The fugitives had taken all the cash they could find, and a number of miscellaneous articles, arms, and so on. But the King made very light of money, and enough of arms remained. The only serious loss was a notebook of Hugh’s, probably carried off by mistake.

Intimidated by a misfortune for which they would be held responsible, the Houssas made no objection when ordered to retire and wait at Molikassi. They begged only that the command should be in writing, and that a copy of it should be forwarded to their King for Prince Ekmo to translate. So it was done, and the soldiers packed up

their very modest equipage. The carriers retired with them, and Quantiah Kootlah undertook to feed this little army. Then his slaves shouldered the baggage and filed away with it.

These various matters arranged, the Houssas set off in one direction, the Englishmen in the other. Before midday they regained the village, where Quantiah Kootlah's people were ready to march. After dinner, a pipe, a chat, and merry conversation with 'the kids,' as those royal infants were irreverently called, they followed when the noonday heat had passed. Handsome man-baskets, borne upon the heads of giant slaves, were ready for them, but they preferred to walk. Quantiah Kootlah smilingly explained that etiquette forbade him to go afoot, and he was carried up aloft, under his umbrella, surrounded by pages and officials of the household in due array, as befits a negro monarch. His

train, though very much less numerous than that of the Ashanti King, was scarcely less splendid in gold and silk and fantastic equipment. The children also had their suites, and the huge colonel of the body-guard was seldom far from Yini's cradle litter. Though she sat high-poised upon the heads of stalwart bearers, his blood-shot eyes, like those of a fierce but faithful bull-dog, met her animated glance upon a level.

Very dubious for a while was the colonel's expression towards Bob, whom Yini imperiously summoned to march upon the other side. But jealousy is not a common failing of the negro pure blood ; and when little Yini, cramped by the position, demanded her usual seat upon Bob's shoulder, after an astonished pause the giant lifted her slight body in his great black hands, stretched above the slaves, and, almost without effort, lowered it to the new

resting-place. And thereafter he beamed upon Yini's favourite.

At sunset they reached Kiamaduna, and lodged in a sylvan palace, hastily run up of bamboos and palm-thatch. The servants starting in good time, had hung the interior with cloths, set the camp furniture, and prepared the meal. Very interesting was the talk with Quantiah Kootlah that night, and I regret that space forbids me from giving a report. I may mention only those remarks which bear upon the action of my story.

'You will find, gentlemen,' said the King, 'that your visit to Manfi is no such digression as you thought. The Ashantis would never have allowed you to reach Telaga. There are a hundred reasons, political and commercial, which makes it imperative in their eyes to prevent white men from visiting that country. The people of Telaga are not only first in manu-

factures and enterprise, they are most dangerous also in war. Ashantis are brave, so are all the populations of the tableland about. But the men of Telaga have no equals for military virtue of every sort. Their trade with Europe passes through Coomassie, excepting a small part which I have diverted towards Addah and Whydah. Traffic in arms and powder is sternly forbidden. All Telaga receives in that way comes through the Arabs. There is little of it, and that bad. My interests, of course, are identical with those of Ashanti in this respect; but I understand your object in travel, and,' he added, smiling, 'the difficulty for private individuals of opening up this commerce. Since you destroyed Coomassie, for the release of some missionaries who were not even English, and withdrew, the Ashantis have been bewildered. Their ideas of your policy are upset. They regard England as a dan-

gerous lunatic, who may sacrifice thousands of lives and millions of money for a whim. In brief, therefore, they would have contrived to impede you at every movement, and finally to stop you. I will help you through.'

'We are grateful, King. Is it far?'

'The traders who reach me at Manfi count the distance three months; to Coomassie two months. This difference of time may be explained by the condition of the roads. It has not hitherto been worth while to put my roads in order on that route.'

'The one we travelled to-day was excellent, if only it had been a little wider.'

'Allow me to say that your remark shows that want of experience and knowledge of the native which have caused such waste of time and money and temper in the dealings of the European with the negro. If I made my roads broader, they would

be ruined in a twelvemonth, for the native will walk in single file. Put a man with a stick behind him, and he will not, I think cannot, by instinct, march abreast with another. On a wide road the people turn and twist, treading in one another's footsteps, and the bush springs up between with such rapidity as one would not credit who had not observed the marvel. My roads are straight, so narrow that men cannot straggle, but so smooth that one does not follow in another's footsteps, and thus they are preserved.'

'Can you give us guides to Telaga?'

'A hundred, from my body-guard alone. The colonel himself shall accompany you. He was sold me as a slave, but in his own country, near Telaga, he was a great caboceer. The private enemies who defeated and took him have been ruined. So traders report, and they offer me a great price for Moosa Ibram; have I mentioned that the

people there are all Mahommedan? Moosa is free, of course, but he will not go.'

'When would you advise us to start?' Pringle asked.

'The sooner the better.'

'How many elephants do you think it necessary to destroy, Bob, for your happiness in this world and the next?'

'I must have twelve tusks. Then, with an easy conscience, at peace with man and beast, I will accompany you to Telaga.'

On the march next day, they stopped for a picnic breakfast in the forest, and at night reached another bamboo palace. So, journeying pleasantly and easily, they reached Manfi on the fifth day.



CHAPTER III.

AN ELEPHANT HUNT.

DO not remember anything of special interest to report concerning Manfi. The resident population may be almost as large, and as well-to-do, as that of Coomassie. But there are no town-houses of great feudatory chiefs; no retinues of a thousand or ten thousand armed men pour into the streets of a morning. The two cities are alike in general character. The white King of Manfi had not tried to introduce European fashions, and in that neglect he showed wisdom. It must be borne in mind, how-

ever, that the Ashanti model in itself is an immense improvement on the barbarism of the coast negro. But for his own comfort Quantiah Kootlah had made innovations of a practical sort. The palace is surrounded by walls, decorated on the outside with battles and state ceremonies, as is usual. The system of courtyards is unchanged. The King's own lodging, however, is a house, with rooms, windows, doors, after a civilized design. When the Ashanti monarch seeks privacy in the daytime, he can only draw the curtains of his alcove, or clear the yard. A bedroom he possesses truly, hung with silk, its door covered with gold plates, its furniture a wealth of gold—that is to say, he has such an apartment, if the plenishing of the new palace bears comparison with the old, which we blew up. But it resembles a long cupboard ; its single window is not two feet square. During daylight the heat must be intoler-

able. Quantiah Kootlah had a house of his own, shared only by his children and the domestic slaves. He lodged his visitors in an outer court beside it.

The sovereign's return, here as in other lands, was signalized by a grand reception. The chiefs present at Manfi and those of the neighbourhood danced before their King upon the market square. Such a ceremonial the Englishmen had seen at Coomassie, but they observed a striking difference in the appearance of the caboceers. These were mostly young, or in the prime of life, warriors all. The fine dignity of the Ashanti nobleman, conscious of ancestors and traditions, was almost lacking. In appearance and form the Manfi dignitaries could not compare with those courteous cut-throats. But the wealth displayed was surprising. In a scene like this, when active exertion was required, chiefs did not wear more gold than they could

carry. But to compensate for this sacrifice, they decked their favourite slaves with nuggets, stringing them round chest and arms until the unfortunates could scarcely toddle.

The reception finished, Quantiah Kootlah announced his intention of hunting, and the air rang with jubilation. One after another the caboceers declared that this resolve was the single blessing for which they had craved, that pernicious beasts would extinguish themselves when they heard of it, did they not long for the honour of death at his Majesty's hand. Little Yini translated these remarks in her funny way quite gravely.

'You people are great shikaris, it seems,' said Hugh, as they walked homeward beside the King's chair, amidst a dancing, yelling, volleying crowd.

'Quite the contrary. We have a class of hunters, but neither chiefs nor populace

understand the Englishman's love of sport. Those observations were quite conventional. They do not really think I mean to hunt—and there they are quite right. Your arrival is a mystery on which they lay awful significance, and the popular notion is, I suspect, that we are going together to the woods for the performance of some unutterable ceremonies which will knock Ashanti and Dahomey into two cocked-hats.'

'I wish we could for their sake,' said Pringle.

'Your caboceers are a rough set, but manly, I should think.'

'They would not hold their positions if they weren't. We have no room in Manfi for ornamental aristocrats. Most of those fellows have been slaves, promoted for good behaviour in the field. I kicked out my Ashanti dandies years ago. If I had not, they would long since have solved our political difficulties in the Borgian manner.'

‘I should not have supposed that such masterful people were addicted to those practices.’

‘We have an idea in England that brave men are straightforward in policy and action. If that were true in any sense of Christians, it is not a maxim to trust in Africa. I have lived five years under risk of assassination from hour to hour. Against the knife I take precaution, but they have means more effective. The knowledge of these people in herbs is astonishing, and their methods of using the knowledge diabolically ingenious. I could tell stories of patient craft, of deep-laid combinations minutely thought out and varied under circumstances as they occurred, which you could scarcely parallel. Ashanti herbalists are not limited to killing and curing. They can affect a man’s mind. From the composition of a love-philtre to a lotion for dyeing hair or restoring it, they are adepts.’

‘You bear your anxieties well, King.’

‘Not well, when I think about them. Who was it said that a prisoner could always escape in the long-run, because he must be always thinking of getting out whilst his gaolers would not always be thinking of keeping him in? It is not true, anyhow. But my case is just the reverse. I have guards incorruptible and devoted. I have the cleverest of all the Gri-gri women in the country, who is responsible for what I eat and drink and wear, and almost see. But sooner or later the enemy will break in.’

The King was agitated, and Pringle changed the subject. But after awhile it recurred.

‘I should like to see your Gri-gri woman,’ said Bob.

‘Memi Gisha? She would seem to you the most amiable, motherly negress in the world. I have the utmost respect and con-

fidence in her for all that relates to my family and my interests. But she has terrible secrets. She is an awful woman!’

‘Would you mind telling us what you know of Fetish worship?’ Pringle asked.

‘As a worship, it is nonsense so gross that no human being could heed it. The missionaries see no further, and their simple souls are amazed. Politically, the thing is not a worship, but a system, based upon a consummate knowledge of herbs, a profound acquaintance with human nature, and a fearful familiarity with those mysteries we used to call at Oxford—what was the word? Electric——’

‘Electro-biology,’ said Hugh. ‘So you were at Oxford, King?’

‘I have passed through many mills! A Miss Eagle, there, astonished us with her tricks. Memi Gisha would smile at them.’

‘She is a “white witch,” I suppose?’

‘Towards me and mine. What she does outside I don’t ask, and, indeed, I daren’t. Such power is a fearful temptation. This I know, that it kills the moral sense.’

‘But you are not afraid of treachery?’

‘Little Yini is her idol. My child protects me. But pray let us drop the subject, gentlemen.’

At the evening meal he gave his visitors much useful information about elephants in that part of the world.

‘Our hunting,’ said the King, ‘is very different from the Indian. We have only too many elephants in the part to which I shall take you. My hunters always know where to find the biggest tusks, and their trouble is to isolate the old bull. Men armed with spears, you know, must get close to the game before attacking, and African elephants charge if they find themselves pressed. Then the spearmen help

one another, but accidents are terribly common.'

'I wonder you have not tried to tame the beasts if they are so numerous,' Pringle observed.

'That question touches one of the stock arguments which prove the negro's stupidity to us superior beings; but in fact it proves our thoughtless ignorance, nothing more. If you travel with my men as far as Telaga, I'll be bound you will see cause to admit that they are shrewd and ingenious enough for their purposes. They know that elephants may be tamed, but what would be the use of them to us? What should I do with one, much more with a stableful? Men must reach a point in civilization before they can utilize the elephant. Where there are no roads, no steady commerce, no public works, no room for a pitched battle, even horses are in the way. If you urge that these deficiencies prove the

negro to be stupid, I could meet you there, if it were worth while. But that's another argument, anyway.'

'It's obvious enough when you come to think of it,' said Hugh. 'But allow me to say that I am thinking what a strange life yours must have been.'

'Do you find your own so strange?'

'No such luck up to this.'

'But you may win a kingdom just as easily as I did, if you choose. I don't admit anything extraordinary about it, beyond the first step of embarking to seek a fortune on this coast.'

'Would it be improper to ask if you had any ambition of founding a kingdom when you came here?'

'I had a firm intention of amusing myself, that's all. And I have succeeded.'

Quantiah Kootlah's manner was not encouraging, but the young men felt too much curiosity to let this reference slip.

‘West Africa is an odd place to seek either fortune or amusement,’ said Pringle.

‘That is probably the reason why I have found both. Without asking your own motives for coming here, I trust you may be as successful.’

‘A clean hit, Pringle!’ Hugh laughed. ‘But Prince Ekmo told us that you were settled at Cape Coast.’

The King flushed angrily. ‘He told you I was in business?—behind the counter, perhaps? No one knows better than Prince Ekmo that my trading career was an adventure. Chance brought me here. I happened to fall into a scrape, happened to meet the captain of a steamer who was an acquaintance. He happened to be sailing next day, and invited me to accompany him as a guest—but I paid my fare. The steamer happened to be going to this coast, and one of the passengers asked me to stay with him. The idea struck me as droll. I

accepted, meaning to go on in a few weeks. But things were lively at Cape Coast just then. The Ashantis had crossed the Prah, and business was downright exciting. I plunged into commerce in a very uncommercial spirit, but I succeeded in making it pay when other people were ruined. Some of them caused questions to be asked in Parliament. The Governor of Cape Coast was an excellent fellow, but wanting in the courage of his opinions. I saw that there is no career for honest enterprise within the reach of an emasculate and hysterical legislature, and very cheerfully I took refuge among savages, who are men at least.'

'That is rather a favourite notion of yours, King, isn't it? You think that the nearer a man approaches the brute the more human he is?' said Pringle.

'Such questions, sir, need a fineness and a variety of distinction which I don't think they deserve for their intrinsic importance. They bore me.'

‘But please explain this particular instance. I ask it in the name of hospitality.’

‘That is sacred with us savages—is it sacred with you? Briefly, then, I hold that those acts of mine which irritated and alarmed the English Government, and English morality, and Heaven knows what else, were very proper under the circumstances—such as men in a healthy frame of mind regard as so natural that it would not occur to them even to think before acting.’

‘They were done to further your advantage?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I do not mean to give offence. You will admit that a story so strange as yours lends an interest to the observation of its hero’s character which will justify inquiry. And you are in a healthy frame of mind, King, I hope?’

Quantiah Kootlah laughed. ‘A good

point. Yes, I am in a healthy frame of mind when I recollect myself, but old prejudices arise now and then. I thank you, Captain Pringle, for the hint. Go on with your studies.'

'I don't ask what the acts were——'

'But I will tell you. I waged private warfare.'

'And killed people, I suppose? With the object of furthering your own purposes, which, as I understand, were partly to make a fortune, but more especially to amuse yourself?'

Hugh was shocked, and he cried out; but the King smiled.

'Yes,' he said. 'That is what it came to. In the pursuit of their own fortune and amusement certain persons got in the way of my enterprises for the same object. They would not have been so unreasonable as to complain of my proceedings; they simply resisted them. And if the result

had been otherwise, I should not have complained of theirs.'

'Allow me to say, King, that my researches thus far tend to persuade me that you are a very fine example of an anachronism.'

'So I used to think sometimes, I remember, when I was a boy and used long words. At present I am not so certain as I should like to be of the meaning of "anachronism."'

Bob Holmes had been listening with the quaint gravity habitual to him. Said he: 'The hardest word they gave me to spell at Sandhurst was "logarithm." Let me call your attention to the fact, King, that neither Hugh nor I have taken any share in this impertinent examination. You are going to summon the executioners, of course. Please impress upon them that we are guiltless——'

'I shall not fail to draw a distinction when the time comes. Captain Pringle is

diverting me quite as much as himself. Pray don't discourage him. What is the next question, Captain Pringle?

'Have I *carte blanche* under your sign-manual, sir?'

'You have. Say what you please.'

'Your career must have had many thrilling incidents, King; and from the glimpse you show us of your character, I see that you could tell them in the most interesting way. May I hope that some day we shall hear the legend?'

'Perhaps—but not here.'

'I should particularly like to gather something, if it may be suggested without offence, of your early life among the degenerate sons of men in England—not of your family, of course, King, but of your training.'

'What do you imagine? Was I in the service?'

'Not for any length of time, I think.'

‘Why not?’

‘You are too irregular in your ways of thought.’

‘Could you believe I had been a clergyman?’

‘Yes, I think I could believe that. Decidedly, if I am to choose among the professions, I should say you joined the Church—and didn’t agree with it.’

The King laughed heartily, and seemed willing to pursue the subject. But at this moment little Yini interrupted them, bursting in with petulant clamour. She ran to her father, and volubly upbraided him. A child more quaintly pretty could not well be found even in Europe. The Ashantis had treated her kindly, and made a distinction by allowing her to wear a robe. But a slave little Yini had been for months, and her face had darkened by exposure. The natural hue of the skin was golden bronze, and the only distinct sign of negro blood was

visible in her hair, which, though not exactly woolly, might be combed out straight to a surprising length and made to stand horizontally. It had a reddish tinge, so pronounced that the sunshine sparkled in it. The features were round and more fleshy, perhaps, than those of a pretty English girl at the corresponding age. The nose wanted prominence ; the lips were gathered and folded like a half-blown rose. An expert will recognise these marks not unfrequently among white girls, who would be astonished at the hint of negro parentage in some remote generation. The eyes were large and grey, full of roguish intelligence. And the figure, of course, was perfect in slender, lissom grace.

Yini sprang upon her father's knee and hugged him, whilst arguing and coaxing without a pause. Her arms were bound with strings of snowy shells, and coils of nuggets, very light, mere strips of metal,

suspended on a cord. That form of jewellery is as quaint as charming of effect, but ill-adapted for caresses. Quantiah Kootlah grimaced while he laughed, and tried to push his little girl away; but the more he struggled the more tightly she clung, the more impetuously she talked and kissed, whilst nipping his flesh among a thousand small machines of torture.

‘There, there!’ he cried at length, ‘you shall go. Only get up.’

With a final twist of all the excruciating appliances at her command, she bounded off.

‘I say, you fellows Bob!’ she cried, ‘I go!’ and vanished, while the King sat ruefully smoothing the back of his neck. When the laughter had subsided, Pringle observed:

‘Surely that child is not even half black?’

‘No. The mother came from the farthest

inland country, so distant that the Ashanti slave-dealers did not recognise her tribe-mark.'

'May one ask how you found her?' asked Hugh. 'We are all interested in your children.'

'Their mother's story is a common one. She passed from one slave-dealer to another, as a baby, and she remembered actually nothing of her people. I bought her on my first visit to Coomassie.—Now I will tell you my plans. I have some business in a district where elephants abound, and I propose to take you with me. Some part of the way we have a passable road, that leading to Telaga; by-the-bye, orders are issued to mend the bush-path as well as time allows. I have a small country house on Bozo Hill which we will make our headquarters, if it is not beyond repair. Starting to-morrow afternoon, we shall reach our hunting-ground on the morning of the

third day. I shall leave you and the children for twenty-four hours ; after that I will stay a couple of days. And if you are not satisfied then, I must return without you and arrange accordingly.'

'We are most grateful, King ! Your export of ivory is very large, I suppose?'

'If it were, the game would not be so plentiful. You see, gentlemen, I have no trade. At certain intervals, my friends on the coast send me gunpowder and arms and such things, but they take payment only in gold. Ivory is cumbersome merchandise, and it invites attack. If I dared make the expedition, whilst Ashanti threatens my flank, I could clear a trade route to the Volta, and then this country would see changes.'

'Listen to our overtures then, and make peace with Ashanti !—You keep hunters, however?'

'The caboceer of Bozo furnishes me with

a hundred leopard-skins a year, and he has a staff of shikaris. They kill elephants also, for our small trade.'

Next afternoon they started on the Telaga road. The giant colonel accompanied them, with two hundred of the body-guard. Though the King marched in little state, an army of slaves and carriers had preceded them. Yini and Juma rode in their man-carriages, with a retinue of women and girls, nurses, servants, and playfellows. At the evening camp, huts were ready and supper prepared. After the early march next day they left the high-road for a bush-track, hastily set in order for the monarch's use. Signs of elephant were plenty before evening, and continued to increase as the travellers approached their destination. Villages became less frequent; as for cultivation, that of course lay hid, if it existed, behind a mask of trees.

The third morning brought them to

Bozo Hill, upon the crest of which they found a substantial house, in great need of repair. Slaves were patching it up in haste. The caboceer of the district awaited them. He reported that his men had singled out a herd, containing an enormous tusker. Its noon resting-place could be foretold by these experienced trackers in the morning, and they would lead the party straight upon it. Meantime, other herds would be driven off, so far as possible.

The King purposed to leave at dawn, with the greater part of his retinue.

‘There is not the slightest danger,’ he said—‘not, I mean, under these walls. But in the bush you must depend upon yourselves. Elephant-hunting is no sport for cripples! I confess that I am not without anxiety on your account. Remember you will find no support in my negroes. They could not help you if they would, and they will certainly not try!’

After the King's departure the hours were all too long. At ten o'clock the shikaris arrived, and little Yini translated their report, which was most satisfactory. With her girl-suite she accompanied them down the hill, but halted, like a good child, at the place her father desired.

'The elephant down there,' she said, 'not far. I wait, listen—boom—boom! Good-bye, Bob! Bless you! Take care of yourself!'

She kissed them all, hugged her favourite, and started some noisy game with her comrades.

'Hush, dear!' said Bob, turning. 'You will frighten the game!'

'Oh no! I ask the hunter-man! He tells wind strong. Be off, you fellows!'

So far as they understood the arrangements, which the King had explained before starting, a body of negroes would circle round the elephants at such a distance as would set them moving down the wind,

without alarming them. The direction of their retreat was guessed with tolerable certainty, and to make sure, scouts posted in the trees would send a message. Negroes accompanying the hunters were to lead them across the track. The Englishmen thought that such great beasts would hardly fail to give ample warning of their approach, even in that dense jungle.

The march was toilsome and uncomfortable. They had to make their way through jungle matted and interlaced, among leeches and ants underfoot, stinging flies in big mud nests upon the branches. The negroes slipped through the undergrowth like shadows, skirting a place impracticable but never losing the direction. For two hours they struggled on, soaked with perspiration, bruised and irritated. Then a scout met them, and they badly felt the absence of an interpreter. His animated whispers were unintelligible. Bob grew

tired of pantomime. Eagerly and impatiently he signified assent, and they resumed their way. Presently the negroes, who had been growing more and more excited, paused, listened, and consulted below their breath. One pushed ahead so quietly that the branches did not even rustle. His comrades waited silent, trembling with expectation. In a few moments he returned, softly as he went. His eyes rolled. Putting his mouth to Hugh's ear he whispered hastily, nodded, gesticulated, and stole away. The others followed, vanishing among the brushwood; left the Englishmen staring in bewilderment! They stood close together. No sound was heard but the souging and rustling of the wind at a giddy height aloft. Suddenly, above his head, not five paces off, Hugh saw a grey shadow behind the green. Under the excitement of the moment, startled, forgetting all prudence, he threw up his gun and fired. A roar

like an earthquake mingled with the report; the timber crashed, Hugh was caught round the shoulders, snatched high in air, hurled smashing through the boughs; and simultaneously rose screams and trumpeting on every side—the forest bent and swayed with awful clamour. The wounded elephant stood still, roaring incessantly, seeking for his victim with trunk upraised and glaring eyes. He had stepped out and towered over Bob and Pringle, showing all his mighty carcase. They both fired, and their balls tore ragged holes in the dun mass. It stood a moment swaying to and fro, then fell as a house falls, with a thud that shook the earth, snapping one of its great tusks, kicked spasmodically, and lay still.

They ran to pick up Hugh, whilst the din of the elephants escaping echoed into the distance. He lay stunned, bleeding from ears and nostrils. The negroes re-appearing, looked in horror, and vanished.

Bob saw the movement, and tried to catch one of them, but vainly. Pringle and he were left alone with their senseless comrade. Inexperienced woodsmen as they were, they knew the peril of this situation. Firing guns at intervals, they made a litter of boughs and strips of clothing, placed Hugh upon it, and set back the way they had come. Pringle took the lead, with a painful sense of responsibility, for on his eyes their lives depended. And they failed at starting. Before he had gone a hundred yards along the trail he had lost it. Setting down the litter, they searched, thought they regained the trace, and proceeded onward a few yards, only to prove themselves lost indeed. So they wandered.

Nobody answered their shots, but time after time they felt a consciousness of human presence, as if men looked at them from hiding, stealthily. The sense of passionate bewilderment, so near akin to

madness, was rising in their minds. They struggled against it, but each saw his own wild impulse reflected in the other's pallid streaming face and feverish eyes.

For near three hours they had been roaming helplessly, unconscious of fatigue or hunger, when they thought they heard faint cries echoing in the hot stillness of the wood, and answered hoarsely. Nearer and nearer drew the voices, shrill and girlish. Presently a child came out, the glints of sunlight sparkling on her naked shoulders and bent head. With eyes fixed upon the ground, she was following their steps. In an instant little Yini sprang to the front, threw herself into Bob's arms, screaming with delight. He devoured her with kisses, and passed her on to Pringle. But the sight of Hugh stretched upon his litter struck her with dismay. They took him up and set forward, guided by the slave-girls, who followed the trail slowly

but with confidence towards the spot where the dead elephant lay.

When Yini understood what had happened, she explained her own sagacious little doings. One of the negroes who bolted came to warn those who had stayed with their princess. The repeated shots had already drawn her back to the rendezvous, and she heard the negroes report that the white chiefs were all killed.

‘I tell that a great big lie,’ Yini recounted, ‘when we hear guns. But them hunter-men say King make all dead, because you dead. Not listen to me. They run away all right, every man Jack. So I pack up with them girls, and here we are. All right, you fellows Bob?’

‘Thanks to you, darling little heroine! Where have the hunter-men gone to?’

‘Don’t know, don’t care! My father take them heads. I tell him girl fetch slaves. And here they are. Hurray!’

A number of the royal servants appeared; with eyes rolling in alarm they saw the procession. Yini directed them to take the litter, and they strode off with it. From that moment the small princess gave up her functions of utility.

‘Come here, you fellows Bob, I am tired. My little feet ache! None of your cheek! Take me up!’

After some grateful, laughing kisses Bob shouldered the feather-weight and bore her along, chattering. Messengers sent on warned the household, and all was ready when they got in; the old-women doctors had their liniments prepared and their medicines brewing. Hugh was undressed and washed. No bones were broken, the women declared; but all their science could not bring back consciousness. After many hours’ effort they despaired, and fetched Yini from sleep to explain that Memi Gisha must deal with this serious case. A

runner started instantly. In eight hours the summons should reach Manfi, and by next midnight Memi Gisha should arrive, travelling in one of the royal litters, with frequent relays.

Throughout the day there was no change in Hugh's condition, excepting that his face swelled and darkened. The women-doctors showed readiness and self-confidence, but there were complications that perplexed them. With much anxiety the coming of Memi Gisha was expected. In the morning she arrived; an elderly negress, with a grave presence, tattooed on forehead, chin, and cheek-bones. Hitherto there had been no Gri-gri work done, at least conspicuous; but on entering the house Memi Gisha fixed strings in the doors and knotted them. Other ceremonies she performed before looking at her patient. Locks of human hair—her own wool, probably—were tied round his great toes and thumbs. But these

formalities were brief, and she proceeded to a minute and intelligent examination. With a razor ground to the keenest point, she opened a vein in Hugh's temple. As the blood flowed, the features seemed to contract. Not a word was spoken until, after binding up the wound, Memi Gisha retired to the courtyard, and began to search among her baskets. Yini then questioned her, and translated the replies.

'Him woman tell Hugh's head hurt. She give him thing. To-morrow he turn out mad. Him fever catch poor Hugh. Him woman tell, oh, he's in a bad way.'

The King returned early, for news of the accident had reached him. Memi Gisha's report became more intelligible under his interpretation. She said that Hugh was suffering from concussion of the brain. Unconsciousness would end in a few hours, but brain fever might probably ensue. His state, already perilous, was

aggravated by an attack of the country fever. Things looked very bad indeed.

The result was that predicted. Hugh opened his eyes and spoke, but not intelligently. He rambled in a drowsy, melancholy way, shedding tears, displaying no violence. After two days in this misery the King demanded a frank report. Memi Gisha declared there was little hope. Hugh might waste away and die without recovering his senses, even if the fever did not turn to jaundice, nor settle into coma.

A week passed ; the King could wait no longer. All returned to Manfi, Hugh neither suffering nor mending for the change. Memi Gisha was unremitting in her care. Once, when Pringle lamented they had no English doctor, the King said :

‘Do not let that thought increase your anxiety. The best of European science could not save him if Memi fails. I have had much sad experience on the coast. I

have seen many men die under a doctor's hand, but very few in the hands of these old negresses. They have secrets good and evil, which would amaze our science.'

Hugh got weaker and weaker. His skin took a yellowish hue, his eyes evidently pained him. He seemed to be relapsing into insensibility, which this time would be the coma, the fatal symptom. Yini had ceased to play; she beat her little brother, finding him busy at a game of death and burial with his playmates. Memi Gisha declared that the time had come for desperate remedies, to prevent the sick man from falling into stupor, when he must perish. They gave her authority to do what she thought best. A dose of strong herbs was administered. Half an hour afterwards Hugh roused himself, laughed feebly, and talked in eager whispers.

'Now,' said the King, 'if he sleeps presently, the crisis is past—we may hope.

If not, if he shows signs of stupor, another dose must be given, and that can scarcely fail to kill with a violent inflammation. It is the only chance, however. By morning we shall know.'

When his excitement had worn off, Hugh fell quietly asleep for an hour. He woke, and though almost dying, smiled recognition of his comrades before dozing off again. Then Memi Gisha pronounced that the fever had left him. With the troubles and perils of his convalescence she felt herself able to cope. In the grey of dawn the friends sought their mats and thanked God fervently aloud. Yini had kept beside him through the night, curled upon the floor. She looked from Bob to her father, as they spoke.

'Thank God for this great mercy,' she repeated. 'What thank God?'

The King's dark face coloured, and he looked away.

From that time Hugh began to mend. Pringle and Bob returned presently to Bozo Hill, and shot several elephants. For, at their earnest entreaty, the King had sent to the shikaris' hiding-place, beyond his frontier, assuring them of pardon, and declaring that no harm should befall them, even in case of another accident. But when his comrades returned, Hugh had made little progress. Memi Gisha confessed that all her knowledge could not set him on his legs for a month, nor could he hope to travel for three or four. Under these circumstances Hugh begged the others to leave him. The journey to Telaga and a quick return would occupy six months or thereabouts. He could amuse himself very well for that time in Quantiah Kootlah's domains. The elephants owed him a revenge, and in other parts giraffes, leopards, endless big game abounded. And at length they gave way, setting off into the wilder-

ness, pursued by Yini's tearful adieu to her 'dear fellows Bob.'

* * * * *

It was about this time that Grace Palliser visited Beaverlowe. When, at her request, Mr. Beaver ceased to countenance Mrs. Saxell's projects, that lady was anxious to leave forthwith. But Grace had never been so comfortably established in her own element, and by the exercise of that diplomacy which came so natural and so simple to her mind that she could not have believed it reprehensible, the difficulty was overcome. Mrs. Saxell perceived that it would be silly to quarrel with her host because he expressed a disagreeable opinion on a point of law. She consulted him in a friendly manner as to the next step, and found him ready with advice.

On the evening of the same day, Mrs. Saxell told Mr. Beaver that her lawyer was instructed to communicate with the exe-

cutors of Raikes's will, Major St. Paul and Dick, demanding why they had not carried out their duties, and threatening a motion. She had also written to the authorities of Chelsea Hospital, inviting them to co-operate.

‘I am so grateful for your kind hint,’ she said, ‘and you see I have acted on it at once.’

‘Don’t exaggerate, my dear madam. I only pointed out a course which your own lawyer would have recommended without hesitation. To speak frankly, it is because he would do so that I made the suggestion. My sympathies, as I have already said, go with Mrs. Acland.’

‘I could almost envy that woman one quality. She fascinates all who come within her reach.’

‘Yes, it is an interesting character. I am often reminded of her in observing your niece.’

‘I hope Grace Palliser has better principles,’ Mrs. Saxell said, drawing herself up.

‘No doubt. Her intelligence and her spirit are of less subtle type than Mrs. Acland’s. There is the same pleasing unconsciousness of artificial rules, but Miss Palliser would be saved from any act of meanness or disloyalty by a sort of courage which I should call virile.’

‘Sir, do I understand that the qualities belonging to her sex would not save my niece, in your opinion?’

‘Ah, you scarcely understand me—it is a nice distinction. I may display my meaning practically. You are aware that I was anxious to persuade Miss Palliser to accept me as a husband in the first moments of our acquaintance. Further study of her character has not changed my wish, but has greatly strengthened it.’

‘You have been so good as to assure me

of this before, and you know my feelings. For all Mrs. Acland's fascinations you would not have offered her that honour ?'

'I should have liked to do so twenty years ago, but I should not have dared. In the choice of a wife, a Beaver cannot follow his inclinations against his judgment, and, young as I was, I understood Mrs. Acland. The most charming of women, but devoid of what is called moral fibre. I am deeply interested and concerned to see what she will do under the circumstances that have arisen.'

'I can tell you that by woman's instinct. She will brazen it out to the last.'

'I think not. It is a matter which has occupied my thoughts a good deal. Your charming studies of female instinct do not bear on such a case, perhaps.'

'What do you think, then ?'

'If I had not done my very best for her,

it would distress me very much to speculate. I am always frank, Mrs. Saxell ; and besides, I took my measures before I had the pleasure of your acquaintance. When those perjured witnesses are sought, they will not be found, I hope. That relieves my mind. Whatever happens, I have worked and run some risk to divert the mischief.'

'You have sent away the witnesses?'

'Many weeks ago. Pray don't argue the right or wrong of that action—moral logic is thrown away on me. We had more than a small share in making the laws which the world obeys, and it is not unnatural, perhaps, that we should think ourselves superior to them—not unreasonable even, to our ideas.'

Mrs. Saxell controlled her indignation with a great effort, aided by the assurance that it would do no good at all. After a pause she said :

'Was not that a criminal offence?'

‘I rather incline to think it was!’ he answered indifferently.

The visit drew to an end. Grace had been brought to express a wish to circumnavigate the Beaverlowe property, and next day, after lunch, she rode out alone with her host. He was complimentary as usual, until Grace interrupted.

‘But I know it all, Mr. Beaver! I am Aphrodite Anadyomene, Venus of Arles, Milo, Medici, and Borghese—but improved on the last. My eyes recall the azure of the sky that overhangs Paradaisos. My mouth is an oyster——’

‘Excuse me—an oyster?’

‘Why, yes. It contains pearls, and it is food for Olympians. Now, will you take the catalogue as read in future, and talk of drainage or something?’

‘Most precious gem of the gynaceum, when the afflatus rises into his soul the prophet cannot discourse of drainage.’

‘Well, I gathered from those interminable lectures which Dick bestowed upon my darling Edie, that when a Brahmin wishes to express ideas of respect and admiring devotion unspeakable, he says briefly, “Om.” That monosyllable conveys to the initiated an overpowering sense of Everything. I allow you to employ the sacred forms of the Brahmin.’

‘I cannot——’

‘Cannot is not the word for Aphrodite. Tremble and obey.’

‘What an——’

‘Om!’

‘How could——’

‘Om!’

‘I submit. Your eyes—om! om! om! What do you wish me to talk about?’

‘About your estate. I have enjoyed myself so intensely at Beaverlowe, that I feel an interest in every acre of it. Those acres are the means, I imagine—the ap-

paratus by which you perform such extraordinary feats of legerdemain. Are we going round the conjuring-table, so to speak ?’

‘ I’m sure I don’t know. If I have been performing conjurer’s tricks it was under an inspiration. You, Miss Palliser——’

‘ Don’t drive me to say “ Om ! ” ’

‘ No, I am serious. It is not a compliment I am going to pay you, but a mere statement of truth.’

‘ Now, please, Mr. Beaver !’

‘ It has been on my lips for a month past, and——’

‘ Oh, keep it there !’

Beaver frowned impatiently.

‘ I am old,’ he said ; ‘ unfit for a young girl’s love ;’ and paused as if for a contradiction.

‘ You have the philosopher’s stone,’ Grace answered, thoughtlessly.

‘ Yes. I can make you happy. That

power comes to me through a combination of accidents and qualities. I could astonish the universe, and I will, to give you pleasure. Don't interrupt, please, but think of what I say. Imagine life with the average young man of average means and average ideas, whom your commoner instincts might tempt you to love. Fancy your own eternal dissatisfaction, fruitless longings, and desperate regrets—fancy his complaints of disorder and extravagance—the commonplace children, the commonplace friends, the commonplace husband growing fat. Would love hold out? and if it did, would it console? Would you not recall this day sadly, and the old conjurer who offered such a different lot?

- 'You give me credit for more imagination than I possess. Perhaps you are right—that I say frankly and heartily. But I am unused to thinking. Will you kindly change the conversation now?'

‘As long as we live, whatever you resolve, I will do what a man may to please you. How long do you ask—a month—two months?’

Grace was astonished, rather vexed possibly, expecting him to grant only an hour or a day. Her tone showed the feeling.

‘Two months, please! This is the 10th; on the 10th of February, if you are still anxious to hear, I will give a reply!’

‘So let it be!’ he answered gravely, and through the afternoon talked history and agriculture, without a single reference to the topic. He gave droll little family legends, sketches of character, projects of improvement, and so on. Grace felt somehow that he claimed her and meant to take her. It was an influence so subtle that she could only resist it by pertness, and then Mr. Beaver was so gravely concerned, so anxious to understand exactly what was meant by a meaningless sneer, that she felt

ashamed. Before they reached home, an understanding was accepted—light as air, not recorded in one syllable—that at the end of two months Miss Palliser might consent to be mistress of the acres they had traversed. And in the evening the Duchess congratulated her, with such delicacy and discretion that Grace could hardly have rejected the kindly words without an explanation. She was just a little impatient, a very little vexed, rather proud, and immensely flattered. Under these mingled feelings Grace found no answer at all, and before bedtime, as instinct told her, every woman in the room was envious, and almost every man thought Beaver's luck stupendous.



CHAPTER IV.

NEWS FROM THE COAST.

‘ Junior United Service Club,
‘ December 10.

‘ **M**Y DEAR DICK,
‘ I have received a letter,
enclosed, which, as far as I
understand it, suggests that our trouble *in*
re Sergeant Raikes’s will is not over yet.
The hall-porter has shown me the corre-
spondence waiting here for you, and I think
there is a *facsimile* of my despatch among it.

‘ Will you kindly let me know what this
means? And as quick as possible? I have
not overcome my early horror of lawyers’

letters, and this seems almost more ominous than most.

‘Yours,

‘J. L. ST. PAUL—Major.’

‘Florence,

‘December 14.

‘MY DEAR MAJOR,

‘The lawyers’ communication surprised me quite as much. It is, in brief, a summons to the executors of Raikes’s will to execute the trusts thereby imposed on them. I have written the hall-porter to forward my letters, and no doubt, as you say, I shall find a *facsimile* among them.

‘The meaning of it is plain, though I am not well informed in such matters. My mother has no share nor interest in the considerations which induced me to abandon the legacy, and ladies are said to be more tenacious of their rights than men. I will tell you frankly that I did not wish my

mother to prosecute her claim, and I thought she could not whilst I refused. The lawyers are too many for me. This notice charges us to give effect to Raikes's injunctions, or to show cause why we should not do so.

'I don't see *my* way at all, but you will have neither trouble nor expense. Your course, I suppose, is clear. Acknowledge the letter, referring those people to Gorman, Solicitor, Lincoln's Inn, and expect me within a day or two. Don't bother yourself about it.

'Yours,

'RICHARD SAXELL.'

Dick now called daily on Mrs. Acland, and often escorted the ladies. No news came from Dunscombe or of him; he seemed to have quite vanished from the story. Dick was astonished, therefore, to meet him in the street, as he returned from posting his letter to St. Paul.

‘How is she?’ asked Dunscombe abruptly, taking his arm. ‘Well? Thank God! It’s all over, Saxell! Hugh is killed on the West Coast. Now we can surrender everything to your mother—shut her mouth, and be happy!’

‘Good heavens! I never saw Hugh, but I am very grieved. He was your friend—your greatest friend, I understand?’

The reproach made Dunscombe colour.

‘At one time,’ he answered with embarrassment. ‘Not lately. I would have done anything to save the poor boy—anything—but he is dead. I cannot help thinking what a relief it will be as soon as they recover the shock. I must break it cautiously. There will be a sad scene.’

‘Ay, until they admit the relief. Are you quite sure that the good news is true?’

‘I’ve the paper with me. Come into this *café*. Look here!’

“Cape Coast Castle,
“November 28.

“Two Fantis who were engaged at this place by Messrs. Pringle, Holmes, and Acland for their expedition to Telaga have been recognised at Addah. They state that those gentlemen were massacred in the kingdom of Manfi, three months ago. The authorities at Addah have detained the men. The Governor has sent a gunboat from this place to bring them in.”

‘It’s official, you see. Poor Hugh!’

‘Allow me to break this news, Lord Dunscombe.’

‘It’s not the sort of mission one would grudge a friend generally, but I am the proper person, I think.’

‘As for that, I do not know; but if you are the proper person, yours is not the proper spirit,’ said Dick firmly. ‘We will go together, if you like.’

‘I do not like, and with permission I will decline your company.’

Dick made no reply, but walked on sharply towards the house. Dunscombe kept beside him, and after awhile broke out: ‘I left Miss Acland in your charge, sir, under the guarantee of your honour. How have you fulfilled the trust?’

‘I accepted no trust, and I have not concerned myself to think what you meant.’

‘No! You have remained here six weeks, paying her attentions, and undermining her regard for me.’

‘This is very childish, Lord Dunscombe! I hope the passers-by don’t understand.’

‘Why have you remained here?’

‘I might say, because I chose. But it would be a pity to check this engaging spirit of inquiry. The doctors forbade me to hunt this season, and I find Florence agreeable quarters.’

‘I am better informed. You are in love with Miss Acland.’

Dick shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

‘I insist upon an answer.’

‘I have heard no question; but if you insist, of course I submit to your lordship. I love Miss Acland, and I hope that God will be so merciful as to grant me her love.’

‘Not whilst I live!’ Dunscombe cried, with a great oath.

‘I cannot admit that condition,’ said Dick. ‘It seems unlikely that the designs of Heaven will be influenced by your life, and much more by your death.’

‘You see how I suffer! If you have any feeling, man, speak out—let me know the truth!’

‘That is a more becoming tone for such weakness as yours. What do you ask?’

‘How does Edie feel towards me?’

‘If her feelings are guided by reason, she thinks of you as a man who did not dare to stand by her in trouble. You failed her, Lord Dunscombe; refused her, I should say, when disgrace threatened——’

‘I did not. You heard me urge Mrs. Acland to let us be married at once.’

‘A bold impulse. But reflection melted your resolve. Now that you think the danger past you return. That’s how the truth strikes me, and I hope that is how it will strike Miss Acland.’

‘You hope? You know it.’

‘She has never mentioned your name, nor have I. Here is the house. Will you go in with me?’

Dunscombe caught him by the arm, struggling with his excitement so painfully that Dick was touched, and he spoke more gently:

‘This news must be broken to Mrs.

Acland, and I cannot trust you. What was your hope in coming?"

'I don't know! I wanted to see her, but now I dare not! You have robbed me, Saxell!'

'Now, go to your hotel, my lord, and compose yourself; I will come to you presently.'

After a moment's frowning hesitation, Dunscombe turned, and with broken steps hurried down the street.

Mrs. Acland and Edie were both there. After some grave, pleasant talk Dick led the conversation to the subject of rumours. He had half a dozen cases in his own experience of men reported dead who reappeared to learn with amazement the story of their tragic fate. Every man who has served in active warfare can recall such instances, and Dick summoned all his dramatic talent to make the unvarying termination as bright as could be. Mrs. Acland listened with

interest; but Edie, as the tales succeeded, put down her work and fixed her eyes, rounding with alarm, upon the speaker. He answered with a significant glance; she rose quietly and stood by her mother's chair.

‘I give you my word,’ said Dick, ‘that every one of these examples I know to be true. You will admit that they justify an utter disbelief in bazaar reports, as we call them. Soldiers or servants who desert naturally invent such stories when they come back without their master. If, for instance, we heard that some of Hugh's people had been recognised at Cape Coast, I should confidently expect them to declare that there had been a fight, and the white men were all massacred, and they had escaped after terrible adventures. It stands to reason, doesn't it?’

‘It would, mamma,’ said Edie quietly, putting her arm round Mrs. Acland's neck; ‘and we should not be frightened. Thank

you for preparing us, Major Saxell, if such an event should occur.'

Mrs. Acland looked from one to the other.

'It has occurred then?' she asked, in a hard voice.

'I am only surprised,' said Dick lightly, 'that it has not happened before. This sort of thing makes the objection to interesting travel. You have no means of verifying a report at the time, and you can only wait patiently and confidently, after putting the deserters in prison—which the Governor of Cape Coast Castle has done, with a promptness which shows that this is not the first occasion of the sort he has met with. In a few days we shall hear that the travellers have sent to accuse those scoundrels of desertion and probably of theft.'

'Where is the paper?' Mrs. Acland asked.

‘I will get it and return,’ Dick answered, rising. ‘But,’ he added, seeing the look in her face, ‘I give you my honour that there was nothing more than I have told you.’

‘Why did you not bring it? Surely that is strange.’

‘To tell the whole truth,’ said Dick, not quite unembarrassed by an attack he had not prepared for, ‘I met a man in the street who showed it me, and in the excitement of the moment I did not ask him for the paper.’

He went out, but before reaching the bottom of the stairs Edie came flying down.

‘I shall never cease to be grateful, Major Saxell,’ she cried. ‘It would have killed mamma, I think, but your anecdotes took away the sting. We are quite cool and almost confident. But who was the man?’

‘A new arrival from England.’

‘His name?’

‘Lord Dunscombe.’

‘It was kind of him to entrust you with the news. Did he come from England for the purpose?’

‘I did not ask.’

‘Tell him, Major Saxell, that I am grateful. Will you come in this evening?’

‘Be sure I will. Is there no other message for Lord Dunscombe?’

‘None.’

‘He has probably an intention of calling.’

‘It is impossible he could think of that.’

‘Not quite, perhaps. If he should think of it?’

‘You have reason to believe he will?’

‘I have a suspicion.’

‘Then tell him—if he hints it—that

I beg he will never recall by his presence the misery I have endured.'

Dunscombe was in his room, feverishly waiting, and he gave up the paper without thought. When Dick told frankly how he had contrived to tell the sad news without causing despair, he proposed to take advantage of this composure forthwith. It was not till all other means were exhausted that Dick repeated Edie's message word for word, pitilessly.

'It's a lie!' Dunscombe cried, approaching with menace. 'A lie—a lie!'

'You had better calm yourself, my lord, and listen to prudence. If you strike me I shall hurt you. If you ingeniously compelled me to fight, in this foreign country, where my uniform forbids me to exercise my English common-sense, I should certainly shoot you or run you through, as the case might be. Think over that, and if you are wise go home. Good-day.'

Dunscombe thought it over, but he did not go home; an hour afterwards he called on Mrs. Acland, and Edie fled at the announcement of his name.

He was not more dull of feeling nor more heartless than circumstances made him. A young aristocrat, removed from the common daily cares of struggling humanity, grows to take a very abstract view of other people's troubles, unless he be exceptionally sympathetic. So many persons are killed every day, so many tears are shed, that an individual case, however melancholy, does not seem overwhelming to one who takes the larger view. It is a great event for common folks, whose circle of acquaintance is narrow, to learn that somebody they knew has died by violence. But for men in Dunscombe's position it is not extraordinary; the thing happens every week. In reading a list of casualties in the field they recognise name

after name, and in the general distress they feel they can hardly appreciate the shock which each individual case must bring to some obscure friends and kindred ;—though they feel their own as vividly as any when fate strikes in their home circle.

So, after a proper display of feeling, Dunscombe brought the conversation to the practical consequences of this incident.

‘May I advise you now?’ he said. ‘Edie will not object to the surrender of her fortune to Mrs. Saxell. Let the woman have her pound of flesh; let me have Edie, and we shall all be happy at last.’

‘I have already made up my mind to surrender,’ Mrs. Acland calmly replied. ‘For the rest, that is ended, as your lordship well knows.’

‘It is impossible Edie should forgive me? Will you not use your influence?’

‘No! Through my fault and my sin Hugh is dead!—My darling boy, whom

I shall never see again in this world or the next——!’

The sudden outbreak of grief struck Dunscombe with dismay. But in his confusion he tried again, and Mrs. Acland burst forth: ‘Let it finish! Edie abhors and scorns you! Oh, for Heaven’s sake, leave me! Go, go!’

It was all over. Dunscombe declared to himself that he would have satisfaction from the man who had supplanted him. But he didn’t. The thought of bravoos occurred to his mind, a race said to be not extinct in Italy, nor even elsewhere—occurred so persistently, in such varied combinations, as he paced up and down the Lung’ Arno, that at length he rushed to the hotel, ordered his man to pack and follow, and took the train for England. What were Dunscombe’s agonies on the road no man could tell. Jealousy is the supreme torture which may be endured by man.

When Dick called in the evening, Mrs. Acland was not visible. He told Edie what he had done, telegraphed to the Colonial Office and to friends in town, sent a message forward to St. Vincent, and prayed that it might be despatched at once to the Governor of Cape Coast.

‘Within ten days,’ he continued, ‘if we have the luck to catch a vessel going direct, it will arrive, and we may hope to have an authenticated contradiction of the report in twenty days or so. It is for you to decide whether I should go to London in your interests or stay here. My only object is to do what will be most useful and comforting for you.’

‘You have accustomed us to expect that, but we are none the less grateful. Oh, what should we have done without you! Mamma is so strange that I could almost think she believes the worst.’

‘I would not tell what I thought a false-

hood even for your consolation, Miss Acland. Assure your mother on my honour that there is no cause for more than uneasiness. But uneasiness to a mother is dreadful.'

Twice Edie looked into the bedroom before midnight, but Mrs. Acland was writing, too much occupied to talk. At length she closed her desk.

'Let me sleep with you, dear,' Edie begged.

'Not to-night, darling. Don't press me! I have very much to think of to-night.'

In the morning Edie stole into the room. Mrs. Acland was still asleep, and she went away to dress. Her maid brought a letter. 'Mrs. Acland left this with Giulia,' she said. 'To be delivered to you first thing, miss.' Wondering, Edie opened it.

'MY DARLING CHILD,

'I write to you last of all. You know how I love you, and yet I abandon

you. For months back I have foreseen this hour——’

With a wild cry Edie ran to her mother’s room. She was resting quietly, as it seemed. Beside her bed lay several letters, addressed, and a small bottle.

‘A doctor!’ Edie screamed, and the house broke into commotion. ‘Mamma! Mamma! Send for Major Saxell! Oh, mamma, how could you have the heart!’

The maids flocked in crying and screaming. Edie sent them for help, and two doctors arrived in haste. They recognised a case of narcotic poisoning, and made preparations with much sympathy but little hope. When Saxell came, terribly alarmed, Edie was waiting in the passage, moving up and down, wringing her hands. ‘Mamma used chloral—I know that!’ she exclaimed. ‘Trouble had made her sleepless, and last night she took too much! The doctors are

with her! Oh, you do not think she meant it? Mamma would not have left me here alone——' the words of the letter recurred, and silenced her.

Dick took her hand with an expression that needed no language to interpret. 'You are not alone, Miss Acland. Regard me as a brother.'

'I do! I sent for you! They will not answer me. Go to them and let me know the truth!'

He went in. There was some slight hope, said the doctors, but not enough to justify them in encouraging Miss Acland. A very short time would decide. Dick saw the letters, and brought them away. One was addressed to himself, one to Mrs. Saxell, and one to Messrs. Gorman, solicitors.

Edie clutched him by the arm, and looked in his face with speechless inquiry.

'We must wait,' he said, putting the

letters in his pocket. 'Let me take you to your room. I will stay here, and I promise to bring the first news, good or bad.'

She obeyed, clinging to him. 'Yesterday my brother, and now mamma! Oh, we have not deserved such punishment!'

'You have deserved nothing but honour and respect.'

'Ah, you do not know! It is that which makes me despair.'

'See the telegrams I have received. The Colonial Office states that the Governor of the Gold Coast does not attach importance to the report of the Fantis, which he is investigating. And St. Paul says, "Cheer Mrs. Acland with the story of MacNab of ours." I told you that yesterday.'

'Ah, but the report has done its work! What comfort you gave, Lord Dunscombe destroyed; and this is his doing. I hate him!'

'Forget him now,' said Dick soothingly.

‘Try not to think of causes or consequences, but patiently wait the issue.’

‘I will try to do whatever you bid me, but it is so hard to rest here while mamma is struggling between life and death. Oh, go to them, and let me hear the first hint they give.’

Long before the doctors were prepared to speak, Edie hurried back to the corridor. She could not remain in her room, nor stand still, but feverishly walked up and down with Saxell, making broken confidences which explained many secrets that had puzzled him. He gathered that Raikes had actually sent the letter, of which a rough draft had been found, addressed to her. And he understood why Edie had been so firmly convinced that the man who wrote that was not her father.

At length the doctors gave a hesitating verdict. Mrs. Acland would not die at once; to Saxell they confided that she

must expect a long and hazardous convalescence, at the best. She was hardly yet conscious, and for many days she might be unable to hold a conversation. Under these circumstances, Dick was puzzled what to do about the letters. He guessed their contents, and since Mrs. Acland might well repent, so soon as she recovered her senses completely, he locked them up and waited.

Days and weeks passed, bringing very slow improvement. Gradually the sick woman recovered the use of her faculties, but she was broken down, permanently, as the doctors said. The long anxiety, perhaps remorse, which brought her to despair, had sapped the life within her wasted frame, but not her nerve nor her resolution. With growing eagerness she asked Edie for news, not about Hugh, but about the lawsuit. At length she whispered an inquiry of the doctor, touch-

ing some letters. He could give no information, and Mrs. Acland demanded to see Saxell.

During this time Major St. Paul had been growing more and more anxious. The suit was filed Saxell *versus* Saxell and St. Paul, executors ; and though the plaintiff consented to wait, at Dick's earnest entreaty, legal proceedings went on in a formal way, and St. Paul was naturally alarmed. It became absolutely necessary that Dick should do something in defence of his case, or should give it up. At this crisis Mrs. Acland's summons was very welcome to him. In the moment of obeying it a telegram came from the Colonial Office.

‘ We have received a despatch from the Gold Coast, of which the following is a summary : The Fantis arrested at Addah have been examined by the Judicial Assessor. Their stories disagree in important points,

and the magistrate at Addah reports that articles of value bearing the names of Messrs. Pringle and Acland have been found in possession of their friends. There is no doubt on my mind, the Governor adds, that these men robbed their masters and escaped. For communication to Mrs. Acland.'

Dick flew to her lodgings, and placed this in Edie's hands. Her eyes, heavy and lined with care, sparkled again.

'Almost your very words,' she cried. 'Now, mamma will recover. Leave us for an hour.'

He strolled about, full of happiness, and returned at the time fixed; Edie was not so joyous.

'I need not say that mamma is grateful. But she does not take it just as I expected, and she is more than ever anxious to see you. You will remember how weak she

is. I have a fancy that she has something to beg of you.'

'I have something to beg of her, Miss Acland, at a proper time; and you may be sure I shall set a good example of compliance, if your fancy is correct.'

'Whatever you ask we shall think it happiness to grant,' said Edie, leading the way. 'It is the impossibility of making any acknowledgment of your kindness which sometimes embarrasses me.'

'I note the "we,"' said Dick joyously. 'Remember it.'

He was shocked at the alteration in Mrs. Acland. If before she had looked strangely young for her age, she now looked strangely old. And her face was set to an expression of weary resolve.

When they had briefly discussed the good news, Edie left them, and Mrs. Acland spoke in a tone of greater interest.

'I wrote some letters, Major Saxell,

before taking that grave step, which I am sorry to say has failed. Do not offer me the commonplaces of religion ! I am familiar with them, and I know better than you what they are worth in a moment of real despair. To you, Major Saxell, I will mention that I have promised Edie not to recommence, and I shall keep my word. But as for those letters. Do you know where they are ?

‘ They are in my possession, unopened.’

‘ All ? One was addressed to yourself.’

‘ I put that away with the others. You can have them back immediately.’

‘ Noble spirit !’ Mrs. Acland murmured.

‘ I thought that I could not bear my life after those letters were delivered, but that is part of my just punishment. Will you post them ?’

‘ I have ventured to make a guess at their contents——’

‘ To you, to Mrs. Saxell, to my lawyers,

and to all the world I confess my fraud without extenuation. And in my own name and my child's I surrender everything!

‘But your son? There is very much I could urge without reference to him. I do not believe, and nothing that has been proved shakes my conviction, that Raikes was not your husband. But I will put that aside. The assurance of Hugh's escape, which has come to-day, sets it out of your power to make this renunciation.’

‘My son is dead! I did not distress Edie by telling her so; but I know it, I feel it. He pays for my sin, poor boy, and his father's. I cannot argue that, Major Saxell. Will you post the letter to your mother and Gorman?’

‘If you insist upon it, I must; or rather, with your permission, I will deliver them myself. Believe me, they have no legal value.’

‘They bind me and Edie, at least. I have instructed Gorman to realize such property of mine as lies in his hands, sufficient to make up the sum we inherited. Hugh’s proportion will stand over, of course, until his fate is proved. I think that you make no claim for interest?’

‘Good heavens, Mrs. Acland! do not lay this—I must say this folly!—upon me. Raikes’s bequest has been the curse of my life—no, not that, for it gave me the happiness of knowing you and yours; but if we are to talk seriously of your proposal, treat it as addressed to my mother. She alone is interested in that sense.’

‘I am not ungrateful,’ she answered wearily; ‘but it matters little now. I want to pay to the uttermost, and rest.’

‘Then I will start to-morrow. But we cannot tell what the issue of this step may be. Possibly, a misunderstanding might arise even between us. I leave a hostage in

your hands dearer than anything in the world to me, and I ask for a pledge in return.'

Mrs. Acland did not speak.

'I loved your daughter from the first instant I saw her. She is now free.'

'She was always fancy-free, Major Saxell. There was a mystery about her engagement which I had never time to trace, but I think Lord Dunscombe would not have secured his bride. For the rest, I have long known your feelings. If events had happened as I intended, in a little while you could have comforted and consoled her. It was that assurance which gave me courage. But I am living and disgraced. Prepare yourself for a long struggle, which I fear will be hopeless. But ask Edie, if you please. My sympathies are with you.'

'I will ask her to-day. If you support me, I have a strong ally.'

‘The weakest and worst possible. But you will see.’

She rang for Edie, who came in with an anxious face, but the joy of the morning’s news still brightened and flushed it.

‘We have arranged our business pleasantly,’ said Mrs. Acland. ‘Major Saxell is leaving us to-morrow, and he has asked permission to escort you for a last walk. It will do you good, child. Put on your hat.’

Edie’s colour rose suddenly. She glanced from her mother to Dick, and went out.

‘Is it not a little abrupt?’ he asked in perturbation. ‘I shall not dare to speak.’

‘You may find another opportunity in the course of the day,’ said Mrs. Acland, with a wan smile. ‘I do the best I can for you, believe me!’

‘I am very dull. As how?’

‘Taken unprepared, Edie would certainly

refuse—and never change her mind. I think she will refuse now, whatever her feelings. But your only chance lies in the bewilderment of reflections this sudden call may throw her into.'

'What a woman!' thought Dick to himself once more, with a feeling that was not all admiration.

He stood at the window, and tried to calm his mind with the diplomatic humour. Edie came in, ready for the walk, and they set out for the Cascine. Neither said a word beyond commonplaces till they reached the central space. The silence became unbearable.

'I heard from Grace yesterday,' said Edie. 'She finds Scarsholme dull after Beaverlowe.'

'I wish she had never seen that house nor its master. They have an unwholesome fascination for her.'

'From other friends we hear that her

engagement to Mr. Beaver is common talk. Does Grace confide in you? What does Mrs. Saxell say?’

‘Grace confides in me so far that I understand Beaver has proposed, and that she has not accepted—yet. My mother does not allude to the subject.’

‘It is horrible to think of!’

‘Have you written that to her? Grace thinks much of your opinion.’

‘Not in this matter, I’m afraid,’ said Edie, with a flush. ‘She answers ironically. Grace is not like other girls.’

‘You mean that she cares only for the material part of things—looks on marriage as a kind of investment?’

‘Many girls do that, they say. Grace only seems to think of the magnificence of Beaverlowe, the antique romance of its story, the position of its owner, and the glitter of his eccentricity.’

‘Is not that much the same thing?’

‘I think not. She does not consciously associate those ideas either with money or, much more, with a person. She does not feel that she must sacrifice her own self, body and soul, in order to enjoy them. She does not seem to think of herself at all. I can hardly express my meaning, but I am sure I know her frame of mind.’

‘It is too subtle for me. Grace has at least her share of self-consciousness, and as much sense of her own interest as is necessary. It is characteristic of you to make excuses for her.’

‘Prudence enjoins us to be charitable,’ she replied bitterly.

‘You give me courage, Miss Acland. I have to make a great appeal to your charity. Through my misfortune you have undergone dreadful sufferings, and perhaps a heavy loss. But I ask more than forgiveness—I beg for your love.’

‘Oh, Major Saxell! You have been so generous, so chivalrously kind——’

‘Allow me to interrupt—on that ground I hope I have no claim. If I had not loved you, I should have known it was my duty to stand by Mrs. Acland, believing, as I did and do, that her cause is just. Let us not talk of that. Give me an answer on my own merits, Edie. I cannot plead my cause. I can only say again and again that I love and respect you, not less but more for all that has happened or may happen. It is my very life itself I offer, and all the rest is unimportant. Come what may, I shall be the same. In any condition of life, if you had been a princess or a beggar, I should have loved you. If you were a criminal I should love you still, for I should know that you were a victim—judge the depth of my devotion, since you are all truth and purity and goodness. I will be patient. I must be, for my love

will not change. Give me hope and I will wait years, as long as we both live; but give me hope, Edie!’

She had been collecting herself, but the reply was difficult. ‘I might answer that I am not free, but that would be unworthy of us both. I am free, but so I must remain for ever, Major Saxell. I cannot give you hope.’

‘Because of these troubles? Say that, Edie, and I shall be content. When they are over, as they will be, I may ask you again?’

‘Because of the disgrace, in which I bear my part! I speak frankly, for there is no possibility of escape. It can never be, and I am confident of myself; therefore, I tell you that your words have thrilled my heart. We will be dear friends, Richard, for life—such true and faithful friends that this matter will never rise again between us. If you cannot submit, let us part now. I could not bear another scene like this!’

‘It shall be as you wish,’ he answered, in

deep, still joy. 'I understand that if circumstances change I may speak once more, and you will not repulse me?'

'Circumstances cannot change. Give me your word, or let us say farewell, sadly, but for ever.'

'You accept the understanding?'

'Oh, what is the use——'

'I give you my word loyally on that condition. Is it admitted?'

'I cannot——'

'Is it admitted?'

'Yes,' she whispered. 'Oh, now it is dropped for ever, Richard! But let us go back.'

'No; your adopted brother has a thousand things to say and hear, and he is going to take you for a long, chatty walk.'

The sun was setting when they returned, and Mrs. Acland had gone to her room. The manner of Edie's good-bye showed their relations after that long talk.

‘ You must come back as soon as you can to escort us to some quiet place away from English people. We can’t afford a courier now, and you’re so clever at languages, Dick, that we shall want none. What will become of us when you return to India, goodness knows! Give my love to Grace, *quand même* ; and don’t be too angry with her though she should be obstinate. If she will not take your advice, recollect that it is she who must pay the penalty. Good-bye, my dear, dear brother!’



CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE.

IN passing through London Dick sent by hand the letter addressed to Mr. Gorman, and then called on Vane. This general confidant had not been left in ignorance of late events, and by Mrs. Acland's desire he was now thoroughly informed. The friends then waited upon Mr. Gorman.

'I must say,' began that gentleman, 'at any sacrifice of my professional repute, that this letter astounds me. Ah! The longer I live the more clearly I see that my grandfather was no fool, and he always said that

astonishment was the sign of a weak mind. Of course, you gentlemen know what Mrs. Acland has written to us. She admits a series of frauds in her evidence, and proposes to give up the money in dispute. Her presumption is that Mr. Hugh is dead, which we may hope is incorrect; but anyhow, proof of his death is absolutely wanting. Miss Acland is not of age. To raise the necessary funds the consent both of her son and daughter would be required, and neither of them can grant it. Mrs. Acland is a very clever woman, very, but she does not understand business.'

'Miss Acland will sign anything,' said Dick.

'Quite right, when it makes no difference. If I could relieve a friend's mind by assigning him the National Debt, I don't see why I should refuse. This letter will be preserved amongst our confidential papers, but I shall trust you to answer it.'

‘I am glad,’ said Dick, ‘to have your confirmation of my own views.’

‘Are you? Well, I thought Mrs. Acland’s letter the most surprising thing I ever heard, but you beat it hollow.’

‘I was right in delaying to post the letter addressed to my mother,’ said Dick, when he had left with Vane; ‘I shall give it to her myself.’

‘The wedding is next month, isn’t it?’

‘The wedding! What wedding?’

‘We heard at the Club last night that Miss Palliser was going to be married next month.’

‘To Beaver? Next month? What an astounding rumour!’

‘Are you sure it’s false? I rather suspect, Dick, that they have kept you out of various little secrets.’

‘Very likely; but Grace would not have kept me out of this. It’s quite too much to

believe her capable of; and besides, I have a voice in the matter.'

'Then raise it at once! I understood that Mrs. Saxell was sole executrix.'

'So she is, but Grace is my cousin. You believe this report?'

'To tell the truth, I do. There's no legal reason for informing you, if the ladies thought right to leave you in ignorance.'

'But it's monstrous!'

'No doubt; but so are Beaver's settlements, they say. Where are you going?' Vane added, as Dick called a hansom.

'Straight to Euston! Good-bye!'

He reached Scarsholme in the evening; Mrs. Saxell received him with dignity. Grace with enthusiasm; but she was a little embarrassed when Dick possessed himself of her left hand, and examined it.

'I am not too late,' he said, 'unless you have dispensed with the ring amongst other old-fashioned customs.'

‘I told you, aunt, that I would not take the blame! It was all her doing, Dick!’

‘I am alone responsible. But you would have heard in time, Richard!’

‘Leave us a moment, Grace. I have another matter to discuss.’

When she had left the room, Dick carefully and patiently explained the situation, interrupted by many snorts of triumph at first, which changed to indignant and scornful dissatisfaction when Mr. Gorman’s views upon the matter were set forth.

‘I have here,’ he concluded, ‘Mrs. Acland’s admission of her efforts to support a just cause by unjust means. She wishes to make full reparation. That, I am glad to know, lies beyond her power; but you will generously acknowledge her goodwill, and meet her half-way, won’t you, mother?’

‘Do you ask me to believe, Richard, that this woman, being what she is, did not

know her confession was useless while she wrote it? But let me see the letter.'

'I could give final proof that she did not,' he answered. 'Oh, mother, think more kindly of an unfortunate creature, who has been terribly tried and tempted!'

Mrs. Saxell read the letter slowly twice through.

'I find nothing here,' she said severely, 'which compels me to change my opinion. If you have that final proof, what is it?'

'After writing that, and others to the same effect, Mrs. Acland took poison.'

He thought it conclusive, and for a moment his mother was shocked. After a pause, however, she replied:

'I understand that Mrs. Acland is not dead, nevertheless? No, Richard, and she never meant to die! I respect her cleverness, of which this is the final stroke. Finding herself driven to the last resource, she confessed and offered reparation, know-

ing that it would be worthless, and she obtained credit for the manœuvre by taking just enough poison to alarm you—if it was not all a fiction together. Then we come to Mr. Gorman's share in the trick. He is probably in league with his client. It is absurd to tell me that if the woman wishes to do justice at length, she cannot find some means! I shall take other advice.'

'But you are not interested, mother.'

'I am so far interested that I can compel you and St. Paul to take steps! You must follow this case up, Richard, now, or withdraw. In a few weeks' time, it must come to an issue.'

'Mother! I love Edie Acland!'

'Is that an argument? Not in her mother's favour. You will be obliged to give her up, as Lord Dunscombe has been.'

'Let me appeal to your love. I have tried to be a good son——'

'And you have been, Richard! The best

and noblest of sons. I love you too well to let you marry the daughter of Mrs. Acland, or to be the victim of her cunning. For whom am I struggling against your weakness? Who will enjoy this fortune you won by bravery and devotion? I am firm for your sake. And for you, my son, I will be firm to the very end.'

'If that is the motive, give it up at once. For I will never accept one farthing, and I will marry Edie, when she consents to take me, if her mother were proved to be the wickedest woman living. But it is not for my sake, mother. You want this money for yourself—to do you know not what! But I know it is useless to talk now. I must think what is the next step.'

'Have you finished?' cried Grace, opening the door. 'I want to show you my presents, Dick.'

She carried a little tray, piled with boxes of jewellery.

‘These are the family diamonds I told you of. I ought to wait for candlelight, but I can’t. Aren’t they—oh, scrumptious darlings!’

‘When is the day, if I am to be allowed to know?’

‘Of course, you are to give me away. The day is the twentieth of next month—five weeks hence. Look at that! and that!’

‘Magnificent! Aren’t you enjoying these treasures rather prematurely?’

‘Oh, Julius sent them to show me, after being reset. They go back to-morrow.’

Mrs. Saxell had left the room.

‘I shall not give you away, dear,’ said Dick kindly, with his arm around Grace.

‘Oh, why not? I shall be miserable if you are not there!’

‘Because I will not countenance a wedding that would degrade my little cousin and ruin her life.’

It is needless to repeat the arguments Dick used against mercenary marriages. He found nothing very new to say, and after a while, though Grace listened patiently, her eyes and her thoughts wandered to the diamonds upon the table. Dick had no fulcrum to bear on, for the girl liked her promised husband, and her ideas did not travel beyond that. He interested her—he had always something new to say, to give, or to propose, and kept her mind expectant. Grace asked no more; but, in the absence of a passion she did not understand, would have accepted no less. Dick's invective of mercenary matches would have come home very strongly, had she felt any disinclination towards Mr. Beaver; in fact, the situation could never have arrived in that case. But, under the circumstances, she did not see the point of all this reproach. Such motives had nothing to do with the business. She liked Mr. Beaver, who was pos-

essed of certain attributes which appealed to her fancy strongly. He asked her to marry him, and why should she refuse? What are girls born for?

Prepared in some measure by Edie's hints, Dick saw this at length. He acquitted Grace of mean ideas, hoping only that she was incapable of love—an unlikely notion—or that she would never meet the man who, too late, would open her eyes. The character of Mr. Beaver was a question hardly to be touched upon. He could say nothing of his personal knowledge, nor could anyone, unless it were Mrs. Acland.

‘Well, dear,’ Dick said, ‘I can only fall back upon authority, which you were never prone to recognise. I disapprove of your marriage, and I will not be present—that’s all.’

‘Oh, I’m so glad you’ve done, Dick, because really I’ve not understood much

of what you've been saying, only I tried to be nice and obedient. As for not attending, you won't be so unkind as that, I know. You might have married me yourself, if you had liked, and it would be monstrous for *you* to play dog in the manger. Now, tell me all about Edie and Mrs. Acland. Edie has written only little scribbles for a long time.'

'Did you hear about Hugh before my letter came? The report is contradicted.'

Dick watched rather curiously, and he saw a passing trace of emotion.

'We saw it in the paper, and I cried. He was such a nice boy! But I remembered what you wrote so often from Afghanistan—that we were never to believe reports of an accident happening to you. I am so glad it is contradicted, though. Tell me, is there anything new about the lawsuit? Was it that you were discussing so warmly with aunt?'

Dick told as much as he thought fitting, and Grace's remarks were so sensible, so full of sympathy, that he was led on to confide the whole. After a warm display of feeling she said :

‘It's horrible to think of poor Mrs. Acland in court ! The first thing to do is to stop the public inquiry. Don't you agree with me, Dick?’

‘Certainly I do !’

‘If aunt had Mrs. Acland face to face she would not be so spiteful, I think.’

‘Perhaps not !’

‘Well, then, you are determined never to claim your legacy. Why not withdraw now for good ? Perhaps they might come to some arrangement.’

‘You are a puzzle, Grace ! A girl of such intelligence and good heart should really know better than to marry Julius Beaver !’

‘I don't see the connection, but that

subject is all in a fog. What do you think ?'

'I think it a very sensible idea. But what arrangement is possible ?'

'That they may discuss in a friendly way, which will be a most important novelty. Things will remain as they are till Hugh comes home, at the worst.'

'What a clever little brain ! Vane didn't think of that simple manœuvre. I will write him to-night, get my withdrawal put in due form, and surprise my mother with it. I wish you would show yourself as thoughtful in your own affairs, Grace.'

Perhaps Grace fancied that the action was not less shrewd there than elsewhere. She only laughed. With some hesitation Dick referred to Hugh's proposal long ago.

'I gather that he loved you, dear, and you liked him. Think what the poor young fellow will suffer !'

She blushed, and answered warmly :

‘I have nothing to reproach myself with. I never misled Hugh; he knows my feelings, and long before this he has forgotten the matter. Have done, Dick! You admit that I am not silly, and I have made up my mind.’

After that there was no more to say. Grace recovered her temper on the instant, and all evening she talked *chiffons* with Mrs. Saxell, appealing to Dick’s taste continually. Nothing was said about Mrs. Acland’s affairs. Two days afterwards Vane’s letter arrived, enclosing the document they wanted. Dick handed it to his mother.

‘I am obliged to you,’ she said graciously. ‘This simplifies the matter. I have written Mrs. Acland, since she thought it becoming to write to me, and we may now come to a distinct understanding.’

‘What have you written?’

‘I told her that the proposals she made

of handing your legacy over forthwith could not be carried out, as Mr. Gorman declared. And I invited her to make a practical suggestion.'

'I hope you did it kindly, mother?'

'As kindly as the circumstances allowed in a business communication. I will now inform her that our relations are direct, owing to your consistent but unreasonable action.'

'You would not accept this legacy, mother, if you did not think it honestly yours? Does it not occur to your mind that I am likely to be a better judge of that than you?'

'Emphatically, Richard, it does not, but very much the reverse.'

The next day came a letter from Mr. Beaver, announcing a sudden visit. Mrs. Saxell instantly conceived an idea that the jewels had not arrived safely, and in a few minutes she identified the thief, tried him,

and sentenced him to penal servitude in its unmitigated form. Grace laughed at her terrors.

‘I am the lost diamond,’ she said. ‘Julius has not seen me for ten days, and he fancies some one may have stolen me.’

Dick rode over to Daneham Castle, where Lady Rainforth confided that her son was going on in a sad way. He had not fallen into the power of Maud Danvers again, she hinted; but he was ruining his future life. His infatuation for that poor girl, Miss Acland, was stronger than ever, though he had more sense than to marry her. Dick asked, rather sternly, where the evidence of his wisdom came in, and learned that Dunscombe had found out something discreditable—he did not say what.

‘If Lord Dunscombe has so little delicacy as to allude to the subject,’ said Dick, ‘honour and self-respect should have urged him to add that the matter in question

no more touched Miss Acland's stainless innocence than his own conduct touches your ladyship's.' And with that he rode away, fuming.

Beaver reached Scarsholme, and sought an interview with Grace forthwith. After expressing his passionate admiration—for it was that which he called love—he said :

• 'You ask me, peerless one, to withdraw from your settlement so much money as will enable Mrs. Acland to satisfy your aunt. Have you any idea how much that will be ?'

'Aunt knows nothing of my proposal, of course. But in conversation we have mentioned £10,000 as a reasonable sum, until Hugh's return.'

'Reason is an abstract quantity in logic ; Mrs. Saxell understands the term to mean abstracted. Very natural in her point of view. In ours I should say it must be contracted.'

‘ You may fix it as low as you please by negotiation. Aunt has no shadow of right to a farthing.’

‘ We must not talk of right, my treasure, or where will you be landed ?’

‘ What do you mean ? That I have no right to use the money you give me for my own pleasure ? If that is your meaning, Julius, I refuse any money at all—and—the rest !’

Beaver’s face changed.

‘ There never was such a delicious binding to such a prosaic work !’ he said, with a forced smile. ‘ That was not my meaning, for all I have is unworthy of you ! But tell me why you are going to make me the happiest and the proudest man living ?’

‘ Because I like you ! If you do not act by my wishes I shall not like you, and there will be an end. Now, will you arrange this ?’

‘ I will, if it’s possible. There are great

difficulties, or perhaps I should say great niceties to be observed. Mrs. Acland would not accept our help—you will admit there is no reason why she should. It must be done without her knowledge, but my lawyers may be able to manage that. If I invest it from your settlement, however, Mrs. Saxell, as your trustee, must needs be acquainted with the fact. And that you would not wish ?

‘ It would spoil all, of course. But you are so clever, Julius, that I can leave the how and the why in your hands, so long as the result comes right. I said in my letter that you must not lend the money yourself, because——’

‘ Because ?’

‘ Several considerations ! I love Mrs. Acland—why did you frown ? Oh, I see ! Well, I like Mrs. Acland, and she does not like you, nor you her. I don’t ask why. That’s ancient history, and I never felt any

interest in that. But so it is, and I would not have you lend what she would be pained to accept, if she ever knew it. That's all. The thing must be done in my name, with my money.'

'Regard it as done, my queen, and say no more about it. That shall be your *morgen-gap*?'

'My *morgen-gap*?'

'Our forefathers loved to show that they did not cease to be generous givers when they had secured their bride. The present most valued was that offered after marriage.'

'It's a pleasure to give you tasks, Julius.'

'How much greater to fulfil them!'

'But greatest to see them fulfilled.'

'Never! A proverb in every tongue assures you of that.'

'Well, I am glad to hear you are happy, being quite satisfied myself. You will put this business in hand at once?'

'Mrs. Acland's lawyer shall be told

within forty-eight hours, through an unsuspected channel, that a benevolent person is willing to advance some thousands of pounds in a good cause on personal security. That will be the first step.'

'Rather roundabout.'

'I can trust my agents to work the circle into a straight line very quickly. Depend on me !'

'I do with blind confidence. There ! Lunch is ready, and Dick not returned from his ride.'

An hour afterwards Mr. Beaver left.

Dick thought it best to remain in England whilst the negotiations were proceeding. Mrs. Acland wrote to him that she was trying to make an arrangement, and in reply to Mrs. Saxell asked how much would be accepted as an earnest. That lady named £10,000, and after a time Mrs. Acland ventured to hint that she might possibly raise the sum. Dick knew gener-

ally the tone of the correspondence, but no one save Grace and Beaver had the faintest notion whence the money was to come. Sorely irritated and ashamed was Dick, but he could not interfere lest worse things should happen.

Aimless and out of temper, he drifted to London. Many good houses were open to the distinguished young soldier, but for the first time in his life he hated society, and for the first time he bored a friend—Vane. That gentleman said at length :

‘My dear fellow, I quite incline to think with you that this Miss Danvers knows more than she considered it needful to tell your mother. But we have discussed the possibilities of the situation in every form many times, and we have proved once more the old maxim, “*Ex nihilo, nihil fit.*” Suppose you were to call on Miss Danvers, and ask her to suggest some material ground for our future arguments?’

‘By Jove, I will!’

Without further reflection Dick jumped into a cab, and then discovered that he had not the address. Vane could not give it, but he thought that Milroy could; and to him, an old schoolfellow and a friend, Dick proceeded.

‘I can furnish you with Maud’s address,’ said Milroy, ‘but it’s not likely she will receive you. Since Dunscombe began to carry on so fast lately she sees no one. He never goes near her, you know, and the girl was very fond of him. But here you are!’

Dick’s card gained him admittance. Miss Danvers was not less beautiful than formerly, but a sullen impatience had made its mark on face and tone.

‘Your name is familiar to me,’ she began. ‘I suppose you have come on business, Major Saxell?’

‘I have an appeal to make. Some months

ago you handed certain papers to my mother. If you know more about the question to which they referred I entreat you to disclose it. Those papers have caused great misery, without, as I understand, effecting quite all the objects you desired. If it is in your power to give more information, some persons who are now suffering bitterly will be grateful.'

'You mean Mrs. Acland and her daughter? I do not see how it will help or comfort them to know that they are wrong in those points where they are not fraudulent. I hear that you have finally given up your claim under Acland's will. It was very grand, but very silly. You are your mother's heir, of course, but those interesting ladies get precious little advantage by the act.'

'You know what is going on?'

'It is my only business now to watch. Mrs. Acland has raised £10,000, at most

favourable terms, on her life and her daughter's, and Julius Beaver has lent the money. Yes, I know what is going on.'

'You are sure?' cried Dick, starting up.

'Quite. I am glad to have given you a little "further information." Good-morning.'

Dick galloped to a telegraph office, and wired Mrs. Acland:

'Most important. Do not conclude any arrangement until you have seen me. I am coming by mail.'

And he took the Continental train, ran through to Florence without halting, and drove from the station to Mrs. Acland's lodgings. She had left for England three days before, travelling by easy stages, and her letters had been forwarded to Paris. His telegram was still waiting the lazy

padrone's convenience. Dick groaned in despair.

He could not learn where the ladies proposed to stop on their way. Trusting to the effect of Edie's beauty, he inquired at the chief towns, and easily traced them to Turin. Beyond that point, no one had remarked her on the Dijon route, nor, when he tried back, at Nice. After losing several days, Dick made for Paris, in despair. At the hotel given, Mrs. Acland's letters were waiting. He returned to England, and went straight to Scarsholme, arriving early on Grace's wedding-day.

Mrs. Saxell sent down word that she would be with him immediately, but Grace ran out in her dressing-gown, with her hair loose.

'Oh, you dear Dick! I felt sure you would come at the last moment! In the very church I should have looked for you with confidence. For you know I have

not behaved badly or unkindly to anyone, and you would not put a slight on me ?

‘I believe you do me no more than justice,’ said Dick honestly. ‘But I have been worried.’

He told his story.

‘Well, dear,’ said Grace, ‘suppose Mr. Beaver has lent this money, what then ? It must have been borrowed somewhere, and I don’t think Mrs. Acland will find us more disagreeable creditors than others.’

‘But you know that they hate each other, Grace. Why did Beaver put himself forward ?’

‘Because I asked him, dear ! It is not his loan, but mine.’

‘Oh, what have you done ! In a few hours it will be his, and he will make Mrs. Acland’s life a burden and a scandal. Don’t you see that a woman’s property

is her husband's, and this debt is property——'

'But we have arranged all that——'

'How?'

'Oh, I don't know how, but it's settled that this is my own exclusive affair!'

'You have been matching your wits against a man much too strong for you, Grace. The understanding is void if you marry Mr. Beaver.'

'He shall put it right, or I won't marry him.'

'That resolution would give me more pleasure than almost anything that could happen. But we are in a dilemma. If you refused to marry him, he would still hold Mrs. Acland in his power, and his hatred would be increased. But if you could give him up so lightly, for Heaven's sake do so even now!'

'I did not mean it, Dick, because I know this will all come right. Go and see him

But you will return when it is arranged, and give me away, won't you ?'

Dick promised to return, and sought Mr. Beaver at the hotel. He frankly declared his suspicions.

'You are right,' said Mr. Beaver, with a courteous smile, 'in thinking that Mrs. Acland does not love me. And on my own part I formerly—many years ago, that is—cherished a grievance against her ; but at no time, I hope, would it have tempted me to do a cruel action. Grace told you, no doubt, that it was her own idea to lend this money. I consented, not without pleasure, for such revenge as that does not ill become a gentleman. Grace is Mrs. Acland's creditor.'

'Do you mean that the bond, or whatever it is, is made out in her name ?'

'The actual deed stands in my lawyers' name ; but I have their assignment of it to Grace Palliser, which I can show you.'

He produced a legal document, which Dick read with care.

‘It was necessary,’ Mr. Beaver continued, ‘to keep the lender’s identity a secret, for reasons which you apparently understand. Are you satisfied now? Then I will finish dressing for this supreme ceremony.’

A number of ladies had arrived at the cottage when Dick returned, dignitaries of the neighbourhood, headed by the Countess of Rainforth. Grace’s brilliant marriage had won her honours already. Before starting for the church she whispered hurriedly:

‘I see by your face it is all right. Oh, Dick, I half wish you had quarrelled!’ and suddenly breaking into tears threw her arms round his neck, regardless of her veil.

‘My darling! I will quarrel now, if you like. Say the word if you repent.’

‘I don’t! Why should I? But your

dear face reminded me of something. Oh, I did not think to be married in this cold-blooded way!

‘My dear!’ said Mrs. Saxell, who was sombrely gorgeous with diamonds—the first-fruits of her legacy.

‘Yes, aunt, I’m ready.’

Dick performed his duties mechanically, like a turn of service. He had assisted at many weddings, more or less diverting, but none so distinguished. Grace was divinely beautiful. Beaver’s keen face and square, upright figure looked a model of patrician bearing. He had no groomsman, but a duke of his own age supported him, and a young marquis was in attendance. Under such stimulus the affair went off brilliantly—the ladies all excited and interested, the parson embarrassed with sheer delight, the school-children quite wild with joy. Grace had recovered her presence of mind, and she was coolest of the company.

It was Dick's function to propose the health of the bride and bridegroom.

'I am a mouthpiece for you all,' he said, 'in wishing health and happiness to the wedded pair. As for Mr. Beaver, I need say very little. His happiness is a patent fact—we see it in his face—and all we can wish him further is health to enjoy it. Why my little cousin should have made up her mind to quit these fells, where all know her and love her, is a question I ask myself in vain. They tell me that Beaverlowe is an ancient house, kept up to the highest pitch of modern refinement. Its owner worthily represents it. But I think it a disgrace to Scarsholme and the North Country that an outlander should have carried away our beauty. Our forefathers made a famous Pilgrimage of Grace, and mightily fluttered the Southerner. In these degenerate days there is not one Dalesman, apparently, who will show battle to the invader. But when

we refuse to fight, the only course open to gentlemen is to submit loyally and cordially. Grace's health, like Mr. Beaver's happiness, is self-evident. It needs no toast. Therefore, I invite you to drink her happiness and Mr. Beaver's health.'

'What an odd speech!' they all whispered, laughing, and eagerly looked for the answer.

'My friends,' said the bridegroom, in honeyed accents, 'I am obliged to Major Saxell for the discrimination he has used in proposing this toast. It prevents the confusion of ideas which makes such a task as mine vapid and commonplace in abler hands. You are told that it is unnecessary to wish health to my wife, or happiness to me, since each of us respectively enjoys that gift of Heaven. Such is the objective view, but I naturally take the subjective. Speaking in this neighbourhood one has no occasion to apologize for the use of those recondite

terms, since you all, of course, are intimate with the works of their great discoverer. In the subjective view the situation appears to me in a light just reversed. My wife's happiness is so certain, and my own health so well assured, that I feel your good wishes, though gratifying, are needless. What follows? The conclusion is painful, but reason has no bowels. Major Saxell's speech, though well meant, was superfluous.'

The table burst into laughter and applause.

'But, as I think,' Mr. Beaver continued, 'that there is a misapprehension somewhere, I put aside objective and subjective, and thank you heartily.'

Dick came round and shook hands.

'A man should rehearse his jests carefully before trying a fall with you,' he said.

'I am like a rusty sword, which will

throw off a spark when struck, but will not flash. Here is the armourer who will polish me again,' Beaver added, taking Grace's hand, as she rose to withdraw.

'You mean to re-enter the world—to go into Parliament, perhaps? That is the report.'

'I hope we shall not want distraction for a good while yet. It is my fond fancy that Grace and I can enjoy ourselves together, and I have not looked beyond that time. You must thaw a frozen man gradually.'

Dick wondered whether Grace knew the prospect before her, and his look perhaps betrayed the thought. Beaver suddenly caught it with such triumphant, good-natured cunning in his glance as gave an answer without words. Then Grace came down, radiant in beauty and smiles. They departed.

The gentlemen withdrew for a cigarette whilst their dames were gossiping, and the

carriages waited. All talked of Beaver, except the Duke, who sat observant and courteously dumb, as is the second nature of dukes.

‘He was always reckoned the cleverest fellow in the county,’ said Sir William Farrer, ‘until that affair with Mrs.—hum——. Then he lost his head. But I understand he means to enter Parliament.’

‘He is going to take the hounds,’ said the Marquis.

‘Mrs. Beaver is to set up what they call a salon, I’m told,’ said a third.

‘His tastes all run towards art. I believe we may expect something imperial in the way of entertainments.’

‘The town house has been refitted in a style positively incredible.’

‘But country life will always keep its hold on a man who loves horses and orchids. I know Beaver means to have a racing stud at last.’

So they went on, all speaking with the confidence of private information. When the Duke's carriage was announced, Dick, standing near him, said :

‘Opinions are rather contradictory as to what Mr. Beaver will do. What does your Grace think?’

‘I think that Julius is a very clever man,’ said the Duke, rising. ‘He has always meant to marry the prettiest woman in England, and he believes he has got her. And that’s all.’

‘This very clever man will rest satisfied for ever afterwards?’ asked the Marquis.

‘Yes. If he has any enemies, he has forgiven them to-day; if he has any friends, he has forgotten them. Beaver closes his accounts with the world.’

‘It’s rather rough on his young wife to close hers also.’

‘Perhaps she’ll open a new series,’ muttered the Duke.



CHAPTER VI.

DEATH.

THREE months after the departure of his friends, Hugh had quite recovered. Making his headquarters at Manfi, he rambled further and further into districts imperfectly known even to the King, finding sport and interest everywhere. There is no tropical region more healthful, there are no populations more curious to observe, than those in which Hugh found himself, and only at the Cape is there an equal show of game. In some future day the African tableland will be a seat of mighty empires, ruled by one

or other European race. Before that happens the whole world may be convulsed with misery and bloodshed; but when the remote day comes, life in Europe will be revolutionized. The northern zone, explored and dug and harvested for so many generations, cannot bear the rivalry of those richer lands when once they enter the competition. Our whole system of existence, our ideas and standards of value, will be upset. Gold must fall to the price of silver, silver to that of copper, and copper to a quotation such that European mines must close. Agriculture will not be worth pursuing. Nothing will be left to those who remain in England but coal and iron, seamanship, great traditions, stout arms, and restless minds. Our manufacturing advantages will presently disappear. Wealth will fly the land, and in its company high pressure, dilettantism, hysteria of all kinds. Our ships and our iron, strong bodies and eager souls, will

abide with us in poverty, as they abode with our forefathers when they harried the *Littus Saxonum*. And what then?

These are reflections that seem far-fetched and extravagant to one sitting after a comfortable dinner, studying his bank-book with complacency, reading with enthusiasm last night's speech, wherein the earth is represented as an appanage of Europe, and Europe as the jealous admirer of England's greatness. But they rise unbidden to a man by the camp-fire. He has stepped outside the problems that bewilder folks at home by daily changes and chances. He can estimate the growing future coolly, with useful illustrations from the barbaric world, wherein he temporarily abides. The formulas and philosophies which have become commonplace error—or laws sacro-saint, as antagonists differently regard them—will seem to him very feeble barriers against the perils to come. When the old system

of life and the old circumstances have utterly passed away in the realm which was once Merry England, what will take their place? Will they leave a blank, perchance, and Nihil rule? A man may meditate and argue for a lifetime, and in the end his work will be nothing but a guess at best. The means of solution are found among naked savages.

Hugh pushed to the confines of Dahomey on one side, to the marches of Houssaland on the other. He saw people contented and merry, though their lives were in peril from hour to hour. He saw men industrious and women chaste; both honest and both truthful, though constantly robbed and oppressed in this world, and unsustained by hope of another. Hugh had been taught to believe that mankind is naturally wicked; but many of the Christian virtues flourished in the jungle, without teaching or reward, an inheritance from primeval

times. This puzzled him. He grew to think that the dangers and the mischiefs which threaten civilization are the offspring of civilization itself.

Hugh's observations did not stop at this point, fortunately. He presently remarked that these blameless people were not unaware of evil, nor indisposed towards it. If they gained a position which secured impunity, men who had lived decorous till that time suddenly ran riot. When, by the aid of a very independent sort of interpreter whom Prince Ekmo sent from Coomassie, and by his own studies of the common dialect, Hugh found himself able in some measure to understand the purport of conversations, another puzzling fact appeared. The talk of persons, male and female, young and old, was full of gross and dishonest suggestion. To watch their actions one might have supposed them innocent as lambs ; to hear their talk one would have pronounced

them obscene as goats, rapacious as vultures.

It was long before Hugh caught the secret of these mysteries. He perceived at length that the virtue of savages is just that which bees or ants might practise—possibly do ; personal prudence, experience, consideration for the general welfare, have in the course of ages established an instinct. Within the community certain rules have force greater than law, but without an individual application, if I may so speak. The man named Caboceer is as a bee that quits the hive. He becomes free of law in separating from the community, and, having no law of his own, he follows the mere appetites of nature, which, in truth, sometimes lead him towards good, but in the vast majority of cases transform him into an evil brute. So with the foulness habitually prevalent in speech. The impulse which urges every animal to pursue its

own enjoyment has full power with savages. They restrain its practice, commonly, without effort visible, but they see no cause to check its expression. Ideas shameful to morality and good faith are of ordinary discourse among them; but a breach of practical virtue such as we dare not rank among legal crimes is there visited with death.

The strict veracity which Hugh admired, and which must always, however it be analyzed, remain an agreeable and a worthy trait, has no sounder basis. The caboceer drops it at once when responsibility and cares give him wider interests. The people tell truth because that is certainly the human instinct, as it is to march straight forward rather than to waltz. Lack of habit, poverty of invention in following an unaccustomed track, lead them to speak honestly. There is no sense of right or wrong about it. If the thought occur to

them, they lie ; if they have time for reflection, they lie well and circumstantially. But the idea seldom occurs ; so seldom that one does not think of doubting when a 'bush nigger,' a 'wild Kaffir,' affirms that such and such is the case. Upon the other hand, one never believes a 'coast nigger' or a 'colonial Kaffir.' The black boy who has been educated at a missionary school is commonly the most zealous and enthusiastic liar under heaven. Why is it so ? The rule holds good of all peoples and countries. That is the grand failure which drives our missionaries to despair. They bring up a boy or girl with infinite pains in the simple tenets of morality. When they leave school, he probably, she almost certainly, would be shocked by such language as is the vernacular of their untaught brethren. But these, in action, are scrupulously correct, while the practice of their educated fellows is usually so imperfect that white people

decline to have them in the house if they can avoid the necessity. It may be that more than one or two generations are needed to implant individual morality, though the spirit of social or convenient morality disappears at once with the state of things that bred it.

Enough of philosophy. Other odd facts of various sorts Hugh pondered on his lonely expeditions. They were not useless to him in after-life. It is good for a youth, if he be intelligent and observing, to dwell with savages awhile. He learns the key of old problems ; he exercises himself with new ; valuable ideas sink into his mind, to harvest at a later date. But the majority of readers may be more than satisfied already.

He saw much of the King at intervals, and came to understand him, so far as a bright youth can understand a man of violence and craft, full of dark experience,

whose easiest moods were perhaps the least natural. Hugh, at least, suspected them. Remembering a hint which Quantiah Kootlah let fall once, he thought to recognise the unfrocked priest in this smooth dissimulation, and more particularly in a certain bitterness against all that is termed 'respectable' by worthy folks—the commonplace virtues and proprieties of life. None of them did the King outrage himself, so far as his guest perceived; but he hated them, and upon such matters no doubt spoke frankly, but Hugh felt no such assurance about any other.

And yet he liked the man. Features of character which Hugh could not have developed under any circumstances, though he had wished, appealed to his imagination. The King might have taken Strafford's motto, 'Thorough,' and the quality which it implies is that which strikes a youth of the day most forcibly. It is the natural

reverse of his own temper, full of doubts and questions and hesitations. Quantiah Kootlah regarded the universe as a field wherein he had license to disport himself unchallenged, with the indubitable right to evade, to deceive, or to strike down any influences that opposed his will. He did not understand moral responsibility. The suggestion irritated him like the babble of a fool. If men or things got in his way, he removed them. Had Hugh studied Mr. Beaver's character, he might have remarked a similarity in contrast betwixt the two. One represented the active form, the other the passive, of a similar frame of mind. Beauty and idealization were Beaver's gods; excitement and enjoyment the King's. But they are much nearer related sometimes than appears at a glance.

Hugh perceived, however, that any long stay at Manfi was not welcome. He had been quite unused to feel that his presence

bored a host, but in this case he could not deceive himself. Quantiah Kootlah was pleased to see him arrive, showed interest in his reports, and concerned himself actively in making his guest comfortable. But after a day or two he grew weary, and betrayed the fact. They had neither topics nor sentiments in common. The King was always busy ; with audiences and administration by day, with secret conferences and mysterious sorties by night. Though Hugh never saw an execution, he heard cries of pain not unfrequently, and he knew well that the government was not conducted upon such humane principles, nor was the King's life so blameless, as appeared. But, upon the other hand, he knew also that Quantiah Kootlah was regarded with enthusiasm by his people, and abstained from judging him.

On returning to Manfi from a prolonged

excursion, at the last halt a royal messenger informed Hugh that Prince Ekmo was approaching the capital with an embassy. He found the streets full of Ashanti caboceers and soldiers, who behaved with the most courteous propriety. Pursuing his way to the palace, in the outer court he met little Yini on the watch. The child grows prettier every month, he thought, and said so, as he lifted her upon her elbows, and kissed her.

‘Don’t, Hugh! See, this kid in palaver frock! What do you think of that for a tea-party?’

‘You look like a jolly little China image! What have you there?’

‘Letters from them fellows Bob and Pringle. And look here! Letters from home, what Prince Ekmo brought!’

At this moment little Juma came bounding in, laughing with delight and fun, springing into Hugh’s arms.

‘Juma loves me ! Some little girls don’t !’

‘Juma not had him hair done—not got some hair, poor chap. I kiss you day after to-morrow !’

Hugh took his letters eagerly. They were enveloped in silk, and tied with that cord of many strands which is a thing of beauty in itself, woven by the ladies of a negro monarch’s harem. Closely attended by the children and their suite of little slaves, he sought his quarters, and to get rid of them employed himself in getting out their presents ordered from the coast. They were not many nor varied, but costly. The girl had one of those cases made at Birmingham for the West Coast trade, containing a looking-glass, a comb, and other articles. They are sold by the gross, at a shilling each. But this one had passed through Dahomean hands, which had plated every article with gold, and made

a *facsimile* in ivory of the *papier-mâché* case. For Juma he had a leaf-shaped knife, welded from the lump without regard to time or trouble, with gold knobs beaten in, and a gold hilt. These gifts were received with enthusiasm, but not for their intrinsic value. Gold was the commonest of metals to those children.

Hugh opened his packet of home letters, the second that had reached him in three months. Those of earliest date were pleasant enough, but every page urged him to come home. Edie's latest was written just after the news of his death had been reported. It spoke of great trouble impending, of Mrs. Acland's illness and despair, of the intolerable anxiety in which they lived. And it implored Hugh, almost fiercely, to return at once if surviving.

'We are deserted by all!' Edie wrote, 'even by you—except Major Saxell. He supports us. He has convinced me that

you are alive, but I am not sure mamma believes. Oh, come to us, Hugh—come on the instant! Something dreadful is about to happen—I know it, and I have neither courage nor strength. Come to my help, brother! Oh, if you are dead, I almost hope I shall soon be with you!’

Distracted and remorseful, Hugh turned back, and in earlier letters gathered smatterings, rapid but intelligible, of the situation. He rose to seek the King, who entered at that moment, welcomed him home, and sat down. Not seeming to notice Hugh’s agitation, he said:

‘Prince Ekmo will send for you shortly; etiquette forbids him to call. You must know that his visit is an answer to my message demanding a safe-conduct to Coomassie in order to talk with the King. I expect that he will try to find out from you what I want. Ekmo is as cunning as any of them, but you will enjoy the ad-

vantage of having nothing to hide. I mean to surrender the independence of this kingdom, on terms which Ashanti will accept, I hope.'

'You give up the struggle? I am sorry to hear that; but you know best, and what you do will be wise.'

'My courage has failed of late, and my mind is unsettled; but that is not all. When I revolted, Ashanti seemed to be broken up and finished. All its feudatories broke away at once, and it was certain that they would quarrel among themselves as soon as they had made good their independence. I hoped to re-establish the empire, to conquer Dahomey and Houssaland, to rule from the Atlantic to the Great Desert. Then the world would have talked of me! I had dreams—but I have awakened!'

'You thought to civilize the people?'

'I thought to found an empire, perhaps;

anyhow, to enjoy a bout of the grandest game human beings can play. If I ruled at Coomassie I should own the gold mines, and then——! Ah, delightful visions! They have all faded, but I have had my time! Now my best hope is to withdraw in peace.'

'Ashanti is too strong for you?'

'Yes. And perhaps the visit of you gentlemen has upset me. Now, let Prince Ekmo worm out that such are my ideas, but convey to him also that the embassy is waste of time. Unless the King will swear on his great oath to receive me in audience and pass me safely on, I would rather die fighting. And there is something more—I will not have my people butchered.'

'Oh, I am glad to hear that condition, King!'

'I don't talk philanthropy, and I don't practise it. But you make a vast error in thinking that I would desert a friend——'

‘ Indeed, I never thought that.’

The King laughed.

‘ The assurance is not unwelcome, since I purpose returning with you if all go well. Now you understand.’

A note came presently.

‘ MY DEAR FRIEND,

‘ We to hand by this favour, and I hope it is well with your honour, as with mine. I cannot do myself the favour to wait on you, for I am, as they say, his Majesty’s own individual. But my bowels yearn towards my friend, and I suppliantly implore you.

‘ I am, dear, sir,

‘ Your most obedient, faithful servant,

‘ HIS HIGHNESS PRINCE EKMO.’

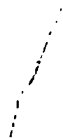
Hugh went over to the shed of branches and bamboos, where the ambassador was lodged, and underwent an hour’s shrewd

questioning, for which the African temperature at noon is ill-adapted. Ekmo was vexed at the suggestion that his embassy should return at once. He held full powers to treat, and he was certain King Mensah would not grant his enemy an audience.

‘Our poor people think he has magic—what they call fetish. They would not let his Majesty hear him *tête-à-tête*. I tell you that what Quantiah Kootlah knows. He don’t mean it. The King will be angry to hear such palaver.’

‘I am sure,’ said Hugh, ‘that Quantiah Kootlah is sincere. If the King will grant the conditions asked, he will go away to England never to return.’

‘Indeed! I am sorry our poor people are so ridiculous. But Quantiah Kootlah is acquainted with them, and he should not act futile. Tell him I have full powers. At the audience to-morrow he will see the Grand Herald.’



When Hugh carried back this report, the King laughed.

‘I have seen his Grand Herald, and recognised him for an impostor—a fraud, I should say. It’s a silly trick to play on me.’

‘Mensah has dressed up some one in the insignia?’

‘Yes—a common practice of Ashanti diplomacy. That also shows what I may expect. Well, we shall see.’

‘I am sorry I cannot wait,’ said Hugh. ‘There is trouble at home, and I must leave you at once.’

‘You must tell me about that, if you will. But I cannot allow you to go until the others arrive. It would be very dangerous just now. I cannot hear of it.’

Quantiah Kootlah spoke with authority, and Hugh submitted perforce. But the refusal did not incline him to answer ques-

tions about his private business, and he withdrew.

Next day Manfi awoke in excitement. Quantiah Kootlah's umbrella was planted at dawn upon a frame of hurdles in the market square. Opposite stood the insignia of Prince Ekmo. The umbrellas of the caboceers stretched in line on either side. At sunrise their processions began to move through the crowded streets. So excellently timed were they, the lesser nobles first getting into motion, that spectators saw an unbroken stream of chiefs in silk and gold, slaves in spotless cloth, armed retainers. The great caboceers took place on their gold-bound stools, with the gold-bound spittoon handy, the calabash of toddy gold-bound, the silver-plated pipe, and all the rest of their magnificence. Ten minutes later Quantiah Kootlah arrived, as did Prince Ekmo, step for step. Before them marched the heralds, shouting the 'strong

names' of each, only used at times of ceremony.

Exactly at the same moment, monarch and ambassador took their chairs of state. The Ashanti heralds marched across, and announced to their Manfi colleagues that the deputy of their dread sovereign had arrived. This news was formally delivered to Quantiah Kootlah, who declared the embassy welcome. Prince Ekmo then advanced, and the King rose from his chair. The former was attired in a cotton robe of the Ashanti royal colour, tartan. His bare brown arms were cased in gold; he moved with a deliberation not quite voluntary under the weight of his golden sandals. Carelessly, as if by chance, he did homage, letting the silk scarf fall from his left shoulder as he stood before the King, and bent low. It was such a ceremonial as Hugh had often played his part in, saving greater magnificence and the absence of

a royal harem. Little Yini, seated on the ground at her father's knee, was the only female creature who took part.

Then the King spoke a few words, and simultaneously began the fusilade of joy, and the bawling of the heralds. Prince Ekmo seated himself, and the 'dash' of his sovereign was borne across by slaves. It consisted of arms, powder, silk cloths, beads, and, above all, gold, in the shape of ornaments and dust. The clamour of the people was deafening. Then the caboceers of either party danced. So the formal audience ended. Quantiah Kootlah's 'dash' was set out before the palace gate, with oxen and sheep, under protection of the body-guard. Presently they bore it to the ambassador's quarters.

At early morning Prince Ekmo waited on the King, attended by his heralds. Compliments were exchanged, toddy drunk, and the Kola nuts, the sacred exchange

of friendship, paraded in gold basins, but not yet cut. After quaffing his bowl of toddy, Quantiah Kootlah handed it to the Grand Herald, coldly and firmly looking in Ekmo's face the while. It was a formal declaration that he did not recognise the status of that office. The Ashantis seemed to be stricken with paralysis, and the herald let fall the bowl.

'That is a clumsy cup-bearer your King has,' said Quantiah.

'What does this intend?' Ekmo stammered.

'It intends nothing. This man has imposed on your Highness. He is no herald, but a slave. I might punish him, it is my right; but he did not deceive *me*. Avenge your own honour, Prince!'

Ekmo's face showed conflicting passions, and he hesitated. But the herald knew what befalls a lump of clay betwixt the hammer and the anvil.

‘Meminda Cormantin!’ he roared, throwing himself flat before the King. ‘Spare me, great chief! I confess! Spare me!’

The Ashantis dared not strike him, protected by the great oath of Cormantin, which saves the most helpless criminal if he can utter it before the blow falls. Both parties, with swords drawn, glared at each other.

‘Take him away and keep him safe,’ said Quantiah. ‘Now, Prince, owing to this unfortunate mistake, your embassy becomes informal, and worse—your life is in my power. But we are friends. Let us talk as friends should.’

Ekmo recovered himself promptly, and smiled.

‘Will you grant me the honour to flay that blackguard alive? He has insulted our sovereign. I pray you burn him at least.’

‘His fate is very unimportant, and we

have serious business. Breakfast is ready. Come and take pot-luck, in the English way.'

They withdrew together on the pleasantest terms, held a long consultation, and in the cool of the day Ekmo departed. He bade his host and Hugh farewell with effusive cordiality. But when Hugh congratulated the King, he smiled grimly:

'I have only scored one trick, and he has many more cards to play. See now, Acland, I will be frank. You are vexed because I won't let you go alone. In the first place, it would be a very serious risk; but I should not venture to forbid you on that account. Whilst you stay here, your presence shields me, in some measure, against the treachery of Prince Ekmo and his followers. That is my real motive.'

'To that I submit cheerfully. Say no more.'

'It may be in my power to do you a

service that will make up for the present anxiety. I think so.'

'We won't talk of compensations if the delay is useful to you ; but I cannot see how it should.'

'The Ashantis will hardly dare to strike me openly, unless they strike you also. And that is so much gained.'

Though Hugh was not the least bit sorry to perform the service of a target for his friend, he thought the manner of the avowal rather cynical.

A week afterwards he started to meet Pringle and Holmes at the border of the kingdom. They travelled back in leisurely fashion, with pleasant sport by day, and endless talk at night ; but when Manfi was reached, no news had yet arrived from Coomassie, but disquieting rumours enough. The Ashanti monarch was said to be raising an army. Quantiah refused to let them go. In a long talk after supper, he gave his reasons, with which Hugh was acquainted.

‘As soon as war breaks out, if it should, I promise to dismiss you instantly,’ he said; and added, laughing, ‘I cannot have war-correspondents with my army.’

After leaving the King’s room they withdrew to their quarters in the courtyard. Little Yini cried through the curtains as they passed:

‘Good-night, you fellows! Pleasant dreams!’

Ten minutes later arose a dreadful outcry; they seized their arms and ran. Beneath Quantiah’s alcove a crowd of slaves struggled and heaved, some waving torches, some brandishing arms. As the Englishmen appeared at the one entrance of the court, the body-guard filled the other, their giant Colonel in advance. He crushed through the press—his great arms rose suddenly above it—and a carcase, black and shining, whistled through the air—fell with a crash against the opposite wall. At the

same instant the huge head towering aloft suddenly vanished.

Hugh was foremost—the Colonel dropped across his feet. Against the wall, fronting that maddened crowd, stood a slender youth. His eyes glared white in a blood-bedabbled face. One blow of Hugh's strong staff knocked the sabre from his hand, another felled a soldier who was rushing in to kill. Bob and Pringle sprang upon the youth and held him, whilst Hugh kept back the slaves. Officers pressed through and took the prisoner in charge.

Then Yini's voice and Juma's were heard, calling for help in tones hoarse with screaming and fright. Bob tore aside the curtains of the alcove, and Quantiah Kootlah's body was discovered lying across the mats, his head on Yini's knee. He was alive and quite conscious, regarding his friends with a wistful glance; but a dark stream poured from his side.

‘Carry me into the house!’ he said, and they did so, passing through a horror-stricken crowd, and laying him upon his bed in the small, close room. ‘Send for Memi Gisha! Where is Yankra — the Colonel?’

‘Dead, I am afraid!’ Hugh answered.

‘Ah! Tell them to bring in that Ashanti.’

Soldiers brought him, nearly dead. But he found strength to raise himself, and opened his eyes defiantly. Murderer and victim regarded one another with equal firmness.

‘Who are you?’

‘Quamina Arkom, the son of Moum-poun!’

‘You were imprisoned? They let you out for this?’

As he spoke, Memi Gisha entered, cool of appearance, as usual. But her hands shook as she performed her ceremonies, and when

she regarded the King in his eyes, a violent trembling seized her.

‘I thought so!’ he said. ‘Do what you can, Memi, to keep up my strength to the last.’

She crooned an inarticulate charm or lamentation as she dressed the wound. The screaming, the yells outside, were unearthly. All the inhabitants of the palace rushed to and fro; the town was afoot in wildest excitement.

‘Muster the guard and stop that din!’ said the King. ‘Take out the Ashanti. Cut his head off before the palace.’

Without visible emotion the murderer was borne away.

Quantiah held his sobbing children to his heart.

‘Hush, little ones!’ he whispered. ‘Bring me the box yonder, Pringle! Will you gentlemen leave me with Hugh a moment?’

They retired.

After a pause the dying man spoke:

‘I am your father, Hugh. I had intended to return with you to England. Perhaps it is as well for all of us that things have turned out otherwise, for I have not forgiven—— No, by the Almighty!’ he cried with sudden vehemence, ‘I have not forgiven!——You will take these children home, Hugh. The Ashantis will certainly let you pass. I know you will be kind to them.’

‘Is it possible you are not delirious?’

‘In this box which I give to you is all the evidence necessary. Yini, darling, this is your brother; teach Juma to love him. The boy is rather a wild-cat, Hugh. Now call the others in, and I will repeat my words.’

‘If this is true, have you no message for my mother?’

‘None! As a man sows, he reaps. I complain of nothing. I hardly regret—but

I do not forgive! No! But you are a good fellow, Hugh, and you love her. Read no more of the papers you find here than is needful. Give me your hand! Good-bye, my boy! I have lived my day, every hour of it, and it's not been such a short one. Ah! that's a consoling thought now! Call the others in!

They entered.

'Gentlemen, my name is Hugh Acland, and this is my son. I beg you to take these little ones to England. My treasure is packed. Memi Gisha will arrange everything here, and I have named you three executors and trustees of my property in a document you will find in that box. You must start in the morning. The Ashantis are waiting news of my death, and you will meet them on the march. They will not harm you. Old Moumpoun commands. Make what terms you can with him for my people. Call Memi Gisha.'

She came in, and listened to his last instructions. The King grew fainter.

‘Are the caboceers waiting?’ he asked.

They crowded the small room, making its atmosphere faint, their eyes wide, their weapons gleaming.

‘Protect these Englishmen to the Ashanti camp, as you value your own lives. If harm happens to them you are lost! Swear it on your strong oaths!’

The King explained, in brief, that to fight was hopeless now; the Englishmen would negotiate for their surrender.

‘Now I have done,’ said he. ‘Good-bye, Hugh. Don’t grieve, my boy; it is well for you!—This is death!’

He fell into the native speech, talking to his children, who answered with sobs and cries, though he hushed them almost smilingly. Then his voice broke and paused in convulsions of choking; presently his head fell on his chest. He died

without another word to Hugh, or another thought to the past. But the children clung to his body, screaming, and Memi Gisha cried hysterically as she tore them away.

His grave had been dug whilst the King was yet living. Women of the household wrapt the corpse in silk before it was cold, laid it on a man-carriage of state, and slaves bore it along shoulder-high. All the female population ran ahead, howling, tearing their naked flesh. The males came behind with torches and yells, and incessant blaze of guns. Their King was laid in earth under a tree, without religious ceremony, the giant Colonel at his feet. Pringle stepped forward, and repeated such prayers as he could call to mind, while the negroes listened breathlessly; then the riot broke forth again. That scene dwelt in the memory of all whilst they lived. The foliage above, black against the calm blue sky, ruddy in the

flare of torch ; the crush of glistening faces ; the white, distended eyes and shining teeth ; the roar and scream ; the volleys of musketry and the curling smoke ; the tramp of many feet, pounding a shapeless roll of silk beneath the ground.

All through the night the uproar never stilled. When they had packed their baggage the Englishmen lay down for an hour, and in the grey, misty dawn, they started.

An imposing cavalcade it was which the risen sun displayed. All the great caboceers had taken refuge under the English flag, and their households, their women, guards, and carriers numbered many thousands. The head of the column was miles in advance when the travellers fell into their place, and it streamed miles behind. Their own party contained five hundred slaves, each bearing a weighty load, with soldiers of the body-guard interspersed. Memi Gisha watched over them jealously,

riding aloft in a chair. Following her came the children's litter; but Yini sat on Bob's strong shoulder, wetting his neck with tears.

The caboceers fulfilled their promise eagerly. At every halt the royal camp was formed, as though Quantiah Kootlah had been present, and guards were set. On the sixth day scouts reported the enemy within touch; their advance had been signalled long before by flying villagers. The Englishmen pushed on with their party, and encamped across the road. In a few hours an Ashanti herald with his train arrived, bringing a note from Prince Ekmo. It guaranteed a safe passage for the English and all their people. Bob Holmes accompanied the herald back, to declare politely that his friends would not clear the way until they had made terms for the population of Manfi. He found the Prince and Moumpoun in a leafy town, a wilderness

of sheds and huts run up beneath the trees. Not one of them had been felled, nor a stick of brushwood cut for the mere purpose of clearing the ground.

‘The Ashanti camp,’ said Bob, ‘reminded me of those swarms of ants which carry green leaves aloft as they hurry to and fro in millions. There are no roads. The trampling of countless feet had beaten down the lower brush, but the stronger saplings remain and form a screen masking every group of sheds. How many thousands are there I have not the least notion, for one cannot see five yards, even from Moumpoun’s hut.’

Prince Ekmo received him, and gravely condoled over Quantiah’s fate.

‘We were not pals,’ said he, ‘but we respected ourselves. Very sad! In middle life we are in death. His Highness the caboceer Moumpoun is remarkably vexed that his son should have made such a

business. You gentlemen are off home, now?"

'When we have carried out poor Quantiah's instructions. He begged us to secure favourable terms for his people.'

'Oh, that shall be so, certainly. I give you my word.'

'The conditions are that no one shall be molested for past events, and that the province shall be reunited to Ashanti on the same terms of homage and tribute and military service which it used to pay before the revolt. We must have Moumpoun's pledge for that.'

'Oh, I get it at once!' exclaimed Prince Ekmo, and passed round a screen of bushes.

Bob called up his interpreter and followed. The Ashanti generalissimo was sitting outside a barrack of boughs, just round the corner as one may say; his officers stood at a distance, and Ekmo was eagerly discussing with the old man.

‘Moumpoun very mad,’ whispered the interpreter. ‘He say so, sir. Prince say you gone to England, what business the palaver?’

They caught sight of Bob; Moumpoun scowled, then smiled.

‘His Highness say done with you—it’s all right!’

But Bob was prepared. He read the conditions aloud in the Ashanti tongue, and the officers standing by raised a clamour of protest. As soon as they paused, Bob produced a pocket-book, clasped and locked.

‘This is my fetish,’ he said, still using the native speech, ‘and I summon the caboceer to swear upon it by his strong oath.’

Another roar from the officers, who pressed in. Prince Ekmo, very flurried, drove them back.

‘This is not necessary, sir! These poor

men are superstitious. They do not understand your fetish, and his Highness will not swear.'

They would not be persuaded nor coerced. Bob gave it up at last.

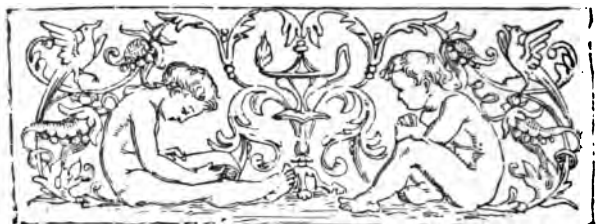
'We shall not move our camp,' he said. 'And your chiefs will be very ill-advised to pass by it. One of us will go on to Coomassie and see the King.'

The great caboceers drew together, sat down, and began a warm but dignified debate. Bob returned. Later in the day Prince Ekmo arrived with proposals which were unacceptable. Three days the palaver lasted, but with the aid of Memi Gisha's shrewdness, the Englishmen were able to disconcert every evasion. None of the Ashantis went past. At length Moumpoun gave way, swore his strong oath on Bob's pocket-book with visible distrust, and the Manfi caboceers waiting swore fealty to King Mensah. Whether the terms have been

kept I know not. These men did what they could.

The long march by Coomassie to the Atlantic had no worse accidents than fever and mud, caprice of barbarous potentates, escape of carriers, and pilfering of baggage. A liberal 'dash' secured King Mensah's friendship, and the treasure arrived almost intact. The slaves were set free at Cape Coast.

Memi Gisha refused to leave her country. She felt no interest in England nor in things English. The wonders of civilization did not astonish her—they were all 'white man's fetish,' with which she had no concern. Her love for the children remained, no doubt; but they had now passed from her realm, so to put it, had left the negro world, and joined 'the other.' Memi Gisha bade them calmly adieu.



CHAPTER VII.

NEMESIS.

‘**M**RS. BEAVER will be home in an hour, madam.’

‘I asked to see your master.’

‘He perhaps misunderstood, ma’am. I will inform him.’

The footman went, and returned.

‘Be kind enough to step this way, madam.’

Mrs. Acland entered the quaintly luxurious room which Beaver called his own; he stood there cool and easy and courteous.

‘I hope you have come in friendship, Margaret!’

‘I have come to ask an explanation at last! My son is returning, and this long mystery must be traced out. What part do you intend to play?’

‘That I have always played—a disinterested witness, with a leaning in your favour.’

‘Then God help me! I owe you ten thousand pounds, of which I owe an account to my son.’

‘Do not let that trouble you, so far as I am concerned. It was a little present I made my wife.’

‘Oh, I know you well!’

‘Let me hope I have not changed, for I have not very much to reproach myself with. As for the money, I pledge my word of honour that it was lent with no secret design—but upon excellent security, by-the-bye.’

‘Then with what design did you cause

me to be informed who was my creditor on the day of your marriage?’

‘Make allowance for my theatrical instincts, Margaret,’ he answered, smiling. ‘I was never one to do good or ill by stealth. Having effected my little *coup*, there is nothing to fear from me.’

‘I know you too well, I say! And I expect the worst when you sheathe your claws and speak softly. Oh, for heaven’s sake, spare me, Julius! Why do you hate me?’

‘You have hated me so long and so bitterly, Margaret, that you think I must needs return it. That is a common case. You ask an explanation. I loved you very deeply long ago, though I knew you to be false and cowardly.’

‘Oh, we are alone! What is the use of lying?’

‘Why, shall I recall the story? It does not move me now, but you may be pained.’

‘Tell it!’

‘I need only refer to the end. When Hugh got jealous did I not implore you to leave him? Did I not offer my life, and all that is mine, and you would not? Then I kept away, but not in anger. You suggested to Hardwicke that he should propose a visit to Wolfingham, among my own people, at my door, and you persuaded Hugh to accept!’

‘It’s false! But go on! Let me understand.’

‘Then you asked me to take you away, and I begged you to wait.—Let us forget these old memories, Margaret!’

‘No, finish!’

‘You made up I know not what tale—with what object you alone could say: It did not deceive Hugh, for your misfortune was to fall into the hands of men cleverer than yourself, which was a strange chance. You ruined all our lives, and brought this revenge upon yourself years after. Hugh

lay in wait for me like a coward—but he deserted you that night. Where is the wrong I did you?’

‘He speaks as if he believed himself! I will not say one word in answer. Then that is why you hate me?’

‘Put it in the long past. I have forgiven.’

‘Since when?’

‘Since I saw my wife, for that happiness I owe to you indirectly. But if I had not forgiven before that, I had learned to think of you good-naturedly. Whether you were alive or dead I did not ask. Your letters asked what I could not give, for whether the sergeant was Hardwicke or not I had no information. But I could have proved that Acland was not drowned, and therefore I did not reply.’

‘You disturbed my son’s mind; a more telling blow.’

‘Again, I must ask you to make allowance for character.’

‘I do not make allowance, but I recognise. And you set Peake to tempt me?’

‘I rather suspect, Margaret, that you have begun to doubt my offences. Why this demand for explanations else? I never tempted Peake, nor suggested anything to him. If I took the trouble to learn what was going on, did I turn my knowledge to bad account?’

‘Others did, at your instigation.’

‘Then I must beg you to believe my word of honour, which you can trust, I think? Thank you! Upon my word of honour, I had never heard of Maud Danvers, nor would she ever have had my information. I was vexed to hear what she had done. Do you know who sent the witnesses away? I did it, as soon as I understood that danger threatened you. And I gave myself the pains to call on Major Saxell at Daneham, when I was in the neighbourhood, as you know. There I saw Miss

Palliser, and my interest in human affairs collapsed. That's all!

'On your word of honour?'

'On my word of honour! But that is hardly needed. For, if you remember me, you know that I should not only have done you ill, but having done it should have proclaimed it, had I been so disposed.'

'Yes, I know that. I thought you had wronged me, and I did not expect you to forgive.'

'It is a sound old rule on which you act. Having wronged me, *you* did not forgive.'

'So we have differed!'

'On a misunderstanding,' he said, with a bitter smile. 'I misjudged the situation twenty years ago, it seems, and so did you. With unpleasant consequences for both.'

'And now the past is forgotten?'

'You may put it so.'

'I may count upon your friendship?'

'Yes; what is it?'

‘My boy is coming home, Julius. I wished to learn how you would act towards him.’

‘And now you know, I hope. He will never receive a hint from me, through business or any other means, of our relations.’

‘Thank you. As for the money, it will be deducted from the sum we pay to Saxell, and I will find means to hand it over privately.’

‘Then you are satisfied that Raikes was Acland? I’m not, but it is no question for me. You propose to pay the whole, and you think Hugh will consent?’

‘I am sure he would in the end ; but my object is to avoid inquiry as far as possible. A large sum accrued during his minority, and Hugh lives within his income. Edie will marry Major Saxell, or she will not marry at all. We could bear the loss of cash with no feeling worse than annoyance.’

Beaver listened with smiling attention.

‘You know your children’s character, of course,’ he said. ‘Then I may understand that the purpose of this visit to me is to stop inquiry on Hugh’s part, somehow? How, you will explain.’

‘I shall not attempt to conceal anything from you, Julius. That was my great motive; but lately I had begun to think that I might be wrong about your sentiments towards me, as about so many other things.’

‘Then you were playing a part at the beginning of our interview? Well, speak out now.’

‘Hugh would have surrendered long ago; he guessed the truth. But no doubt of my poor husband’s drowning ever entered my mind, and of course I resisted. Even now, Julius, I cannot see that I was morally wrong!’

Beaver laughed.

‘I am a very sympathetic representative of the public. What does all this come to, Margaret?’

‘If I can lay before Hugh conclusive evidence that Major Saxell’s claim is established, he will be glad to let the subject drop, and never allude to it again. But if that is not done, in some manner beyond question, he will examine for himself, of course, if only as a matter of form. You understand me?’

‘In such investigations he would discover what—what there is no need for him to learn. That unhappy affair of Peake’s, for instance?’

‘If Hugh heard all that, Julius, he would despise me—and my boy’s loving trust is my dearest blessing!’

‘I see all that, and I feel for you. You have a project?’

‘I solemnly declare that I acted honestly and conscientiously all round. It was not

my wish to defraud Major Saxell of his rights, but I felt certain he had none. Hugh will not believe that. He is proud and sensitive and suspicious, as boys are. My payment to Mrs. Saxell, when the report of his death distracted me, would offend him. Though you declared, and Grace confirmed it, that I did not know who lent the money, he would not believe—at least, his confidence in me would be shaken. And I will do anything rather than suffer that !’

‘What you propose to do at present, as I guess, is to find—that is, putting it roughly, to make—some additional evidence so strong that it will satisfy your son upon the spot ; in order that he may not look closely into the back records. That is it ?’

‘Yes. Hugh will come back as he went, hating the subject, and eager to put it out of sight and mind for ever. He would

go more than half-way to find an excuse for that.'

'Well, I am a very sympathetic representative of the public, as I said. It would be impertinent, and futile besides, to urge that you are meditating another action of the sort which has caused you trouble. But hunting experience tells me, Margaret, that there is danger of falling into the ditch if you shirk the leap.'

'There is no danger—not the least!'

'I am unable to judge of that. But you wish me to help in some way, and I must take precautions. What is it you ask?'

'Only the use of your name. Hugh is prepared to believe that you could give testimony which would settle the question.'

Beaver went to his desk, laughing, scribbled a few lines, and handed them to her. She read:

“MY DEAR MRS. ACLAND,

“The object you propose seems to be harmless. It is neither my business nor my wish to know what steps you will take, and I am willing to let you use my name. But you distinctly understand that I am influenced only by friendship, and I refuse all risk. If the means you choose threaten to bring me into difficulties or scandal, I shall produce this note, which I beg you to endorse.”

‘You know me better than to think,’ he continued, ‘that I should hesitate in doing what I here propose. Take the permission or leave it, but don’t doubt that I shall throw you over if the occasion arise.’

‘The occasion will not arise, and you have given me your word that you are friendly.’

She wrote:

“MY DEAR MR. BEAVER,

“I understand the condition, and I accept it implicitly.”’

‘Is that quite all, Margaret?’

‘Quite,’ she answered, colouring.

‘Very good. My wife is not at home just now, or I would ask you to meet her. Mrs. Saxell and her son arrive to-day.’

‘I should have liked to see my enemy, and Major Saxell is our truest friend.’

‘Frankly now, Margaret, have you never felt a qualm in accepting that honest fellow’s confidence?’

‘No, for I never had it. Major Saxell tried his very hardest to trust me, but he could not succeed.’

‘You were born out of your time!’ Mr. Beaver exclaimed, in admiration. ‘An Italian grandeur of the best period hangs over you!’

He rose, plainly inviting her to say good-bye, and she submitted. But in the meanwhile Grace had returned with her guests, and they met in the hall. Needless to say that Mrs. Acland was seized with impetuous

delight, presented to her foe, and retained for lunch. Beaver could not resist, but he graciously protested, in reply to his wife's remonstrance, that he had done his utmost to keep the visitor. Mrs. Acland did not accept the hint, and withdrew to take off her things.

Grace threw aside hat and mantle to lead Dick up and down the house in childish glee.

‘It is astonishing!’ he said again and again, with just a touch of sarcasm. ‘To think that you should have dropped into such a home of poetry! The story of Beaverlowe is epic, the beauty lyrical; is the master didactic?’

‘I don’t know what you mean.’

‘These are different schools of poetry, my dear. You supply the dramatic, and the property is pastoral. So you live surrounded by every style.’

‘You forget one,’ she answered.

‘Do I? Which?’

‘The satiric.’

‘That was not recognised by the Greeks, our masters,’ said Dick gaily. ‘Where does the satire come in?’

‘You bring it—cruelly! Oh, Dick, I am so bored!’

‘What? In two months! It is not possible!’

‘If Julius would only leave me alone, or give me something to take charge of, I should be happy. But he does not regard me as a human being. I am his supreme work of art, to be admired all day in different lights, shown up, and studied and discussed. He will not talk to me; one does not talk to a picture but at it, with interjections and raptures! Oh, I am so tired, Dick! If I speak, he raves about my lips, and never hears a word. If I am silent, he gets into ecstasies on my eyelids! You would not believe it possible that a

man could find so much to say about a girl's appearance. My husband's variety of critical expressions is astonishing, but they drive me mad. I have broken out once or twice, and then he has been excruciated with the change of "tone" or "character," or something; but I firmly believe he did not distinctly know I was angry!

'It's a hard case,' said Dick, laughing, 'but I have understood that such extravagant admiration doesn't last with husbands.'

'It will last, with Julius, as long as my beauty lasts. He will not tire of that, any more than of his Titians and things. Then his remarks! They are ingenious, most ingenious and clever variations of "Pretty dear!" Never by chance anything but that! And the very worst of it is that he expects me to sit contentedly upon the pedestal for him to worship. I may have whatever I fancy. If it were the Koh-i-noor, he would not argue, but would set himself

to get it. Statues and pictures are quite happy if you put them in a light and under circumstances which show them at their best, and Julius does not regard me in any other point of view. He does not love me, myself, Dick ! He loves my beauty, but for the rest he does not know it, does not recognise it. If I lost my beauty he would forget me, just as if I had died, and return quite contentedly to his orchids.'

Dick was at a loss. It occurred to him that Grace had not much regarded the individuality of the master of Beaverlowe before she married him. Fate brings these revenges.

'We have not seen a creature since we returned here. Julius has caused it to be known, he has told me so, that callers will not be welcome. My card-tray is filled with the best names in the county, but not a soul has been allowed to enter. How long is this to last? I have no idea!

Julius has some paintings which he keeps in a room of his own, and has never shown to anyone. Mankind is not worthy to look on such perfection. Am I to be another? You know, Dick, I never was vain, much more a flirt. If Julius would give me something to employ my time, I could find patience. But he won't! My business in life is to be admired—by my lawful owner—and to lend myself to studies in art. I can't endure it, Dick! If Julius won't listen, I'll make him feel! I'll break something, and compel him to hear me!

Though Dick was grieved and puzzled, he could not but laugh.

'Yours is a difficult position. But so far as I understand it, Grace, you really love him all the same?'

'I don't know. He interests me, and he is perfectly kind. Perhaps that's as near to love as I could get. But I shan't be able to stand much more of this, Dick.'

He could not forbear to say :

‘It is a dramatic Nemesis. Who would have believed that our Grace could get sick of her beauty, and long for employment ! All you prayed for is yours, and much besides. Your wishes have been too well fulfilled—and you can’t stand it.’

Grace was struck.

‘Put in that way, it’s odd,’ she said.
‘But I never meant that I should like such admiration as this.’

‘And you never meant such wealth or such position, which compel you to be idle. You have got too much of what you asked for, and that is a very comfortable sort of unhappiness, if you will only regard it in a proper light.’

‘Do you mean, Dick, that I was all wrong from the beginning ? If I was, if I’m just a commonplace girl like others, only a little prettier and a little more silly in a less ordinary way, why, then—it’s a

bad prospect, very! I don't know what may happen.'

'I do—if you are a commonplace girl. You will reconcile yourself to Beaver's peculiarities, which don't seem to be disagreeable altogether, and become happy in a commonplace way. That's what you have to do!'

When they returned to lunch, the two elder ladies were chatting, and Mr. Beaver was observing them with amused interest. Mrs. Saxell had tried to combine an air of virtuous superiority over the convicted criminal and an air of pitying sympathy with one whose fortune she had triumphantly annexed; but Mrs. Acland did not seem to recognise her guilt, nor to accept commiseration. She spoke easily and frankly in her pleasant way.

'Edie has let our correspondence drop long ago,' Grace exclaimed. 'She only wrote me a little contrite note on my

marriage and never replied to my answer. But I don't bear malice. How is my darling Edie? Now that we are all friends again, Julius, I shall ask her here. You will come, Mrs. Acland ?

'Edie is well, but she has not quite recovered my long illness. And we are just now terribly overworked, furnishing a new house.'

'You are not going to leave Eaton Square?' cried Grace thoughtlessly.

'As soon as we can. But the house belongs to Hugh, on a long lease; and until he returns, since it is such a short time now, we shall remain there. You know,' she added kindly to Mrs. Saxell, covering any awkwardness that lady might have felt, 'my boy is nearly twenty-five, and he will marry soon, no doubt. So we are making ready to submit without inconvenience.'

'When is Hugh coming?' Dick asked.

‘We seem to be such old friends, and yet I never saw him.’

‘He has the same feeling towards yourself, I assure you. His last letter is dated Coomassie, where they had just arrived on their way home. One of the King’s runners carried it, and they hoped to catch the next mail. We are anxiously expecting news from Madeira, which Edie will forward to me here, if it should arrive to-day.’

A servant entered with a telegram.

‘Suppose this should be it,’ said Mr. Beaver. ‘Yes, by Hercules! “Mrs. Acland, Beaverlowe.” I congratulate you warmly!’

Mrs. Acland’s eyes were wet, as she read the despatch:

“We are coming on by the mail. All well.” My dear, dear son! Thank God!’

Grace jumped up and kissed her enthusiastically.

‘There never was such a blessed telegram!’

You have one from Edie, too. If she does not send her love I will denounce her as a heartless thing!

‘Spare her! See for yourself. “Give my love to Grace!” My day has been thrice happy! I have corrected a long misunderstanding with an old friend; I have made acquaintance with a lady to whom I owe much consideration, and I have recovered my son! Allow me to go now, Mr. Beaver. I am too full of thought for conversation.’

He rang.

‘My wife spoke with such charming vivacity, that I forgot to put in a word—these distractions are pardonable to a man who has been married only two months. Believe that I sympathize with your joy, Mrs. Acland, and that I feel a peculiar delight in thinking the good news reached you under my roof.’

‘My congratulations are simple,’ said

Dick, 'but I assure you they are heart-felt.'

'I have the strongest sympathy,' Mrs. Saxell added, 'for I have a son.'

'Thank you—thank you all!' said Mrs. Acland brokenly. 'I cannot help crying, for I have not deserved this kindness.'

Beaver took her to the carriage. Through her tears, Mrs. Acland whispered:

'I think I see how it can best be done. You will hear from me.'

'Remember the conditions,' he returned, 'and subject thereto count upon me. Good-bye!'

The ladies discussed their late guest. Mrs. Saxell admitted her to be a woman of amiable character, but deplorably weak; to be austere excused, however, by the very charitable, upon the grounds of maternal love.

'I am not sure that Mrs. Acland is weak,' said Grace thoughtfully. 'What do

you think, Dick? What do you think, Julius? You have known her so long!

‘I quite agree with you, my dear. Perfectly charming!’

‘All I do or say is charming!’ cried Grace pettishly.

‘Let us hope that opinion will last,’ Mrs. Saxell said.

‘It is founded upon evidence indisputable. madam.’

When dinner was finished that night, Beaver said :

‘I have not quite recovered from bachelor habits, Major Saxell, and I regretfully allow the ladies to withdraw. That observation will not be construed as a hint, I hope. But it seems to me, since I returned to society, that men do not enjoy their wine as they used, when they knew they had time before them.’

‘I have observed the same thing,’ said Dick, ‘judging by my own narrow ex-

perience after nine years' exile. It seems to me that they try to consume their old-fashioned allowance in a hurry; and if they can't get it, or don't come up to time, they retire to the club proportionately early, and abuse their host.'

'What a brutal suggestion!' Grace cried. 'As if we had not improved on the horrid habits of our grandfathers.'

'You see I have not yet taught my wife philosophy,' laughed Beaver.

'Oh, I know your opinions very well. Fancy, aunt! Julius declares that human nature has not changed, nor ever will, from the time when we ran about on all-fours, and our for—for——'

'Foramen magnum, dear.'

'Yes, our foramen magnum was situated at the back of our heads. Isn't it absurd?'

'Both absurd and wicked too, in my opinion.'

'He says that circumstances and habits

have influenced us, but that every healthy and intelligent person is capable of the most awful barbarism that ever was heard of.'

Upon this Mrs. Saxell thought it time to withdraw. The butler then produced two magnums of claret, opened both, and from each poured out a glass.

'I warned you,' said Mr. Beaver, 'how very quietly we live. You understood me literally, I hope?'

'Quite so, and it was a great relief. I don't care much for the society of casual acquaintances, and strangers are a downright bore. I have always felt a secret sympathy for the Briton who heaved half a brick at foreigners.'

'I should have cherished that man!' cried Mr. Beaver eagerly. 'You are a kindred soul, Major Saxell!'

'In former times, however, you kept open house, as I hear?'

‘Yes. It has interested me a good deal to analyze my feelings at that date. I did not enjoy the crowd nor the racket. It was, I think, an abounding physical vivacity and a thirst unquenchable for the *to kainon*, the new pleasure—which never turned up—that led me to these freaks. Does report tell that I seldom asked the same people twice? They came, but I neither invited nor wanted them. After an hour they were all bores, men and women.’

‘I see. Your brimming health kept you always eager and hopeful of amusement, though the means always failed?’

‘You have a quick perception. That was it, I suppose.’

He touched a gong exquisitely musical of tone. The butler entered, uncorked two fresh magnums, filled clean glasses, and withdrew.

‘To give up society, therefore,’ resumed Mr. Beaver——

‘By Jove!’ Dick interrupted; ‘I have

heard of this story, but I always thought the hero a Frenchman and a myth! Do you open a fresh magnum for every guest, and drink only one glass?

‘Certainly not! I am by no means an extravagant person, nor a fool who scatters pearls abroad. This is my habit after dinner when I am alone, but the magnums reappear at lunch.—I was saying that to give up society under those circumstances was no hardship. I had learned by experience that it was useless to expect amusement from my fellow-creatures.’

‘You ought to have joined the service.’

‘In one point of view you are right. I should have been constantly interested and constantly happy in a force like your Indian Guides. But one cannot get a commission there for the asking, and the preparation would have bored me. Then, there are so many mechanical duties in a soldier’s life, even if he be on active service. No, I

thought of it carefully. Remembering what Gibbon says, I tried an experiment in the yeomanry. I'm glad you don't laugh, Major Saxell, for that shows you understand. It was not for me to throw up my commission within twenty-four hours of joining, but I longed to do so. That experience was enough. Your friend Lord Dunscombe regrets, as he admitted to me, that he did not try the yeomanry before joining the regular service.'

'I do not think that Dunscombe could be properly described as a friend of mine. What is he doing?'

'Getting deeper and deeper into mischief, I understand. As we passed through London I met General Randall, who is going to live abroad.'

'Good-bye, Dunscombe! But he was worthy of better things!'

Fresh magnums and fresh glasses were produced.

‘I have had more than my allowance,’ said Dick, ‘and you need not fear that I shall abuse you at the club.’

‘I want you to do a service to your cousin, Major Saxell. She is dissatisfied with the quiet home life we lead, and must lead in future. Within the limits which necessity imposes on me, nothing, actually nothing, will be denied her, nor even questioned. But we cannot mix in society.’

‘Did you tell Grace so before marriage?’ Dick asked, in astonishment.

‘No, but I did not promise anything of the sort.’

‘Since you invite me to interpose, may I ask, for information only, why you cannot go into society?’

‘I will be quite frank with you. My heart has been affected for many years, and it does not grow stronger. What energy I have to spare is all devoted to hunting.’

‘I am astonished and shocked,’ Mr.

Beaver. Surely it would be less risk to give parties, and even to attend them, than to hunt?’

‘No doubt, but I love hunting——’

‘And your wife loves parties.’

‘Well, then, I will go a step further, in confidence. Since my life is doomed, I hope to cheat Death by meeting him upon the field unexpectedly. I am sure you will spare me reflections. That is my notion.’

‘Why not tell her this yourself?’

‘Tell Grace? Good heavens! I show my regard for her by mentioning the secret to you, but it is in the strictest confidence.’

‘Grace would submit, I’m sure, for such a reason; but otherwise——’

‘Otherwise, you think, she will not attend to your advice?’

‘You will discover for yourself. I fear not. To speak frankly, she may well have entertained very different ideas of her life at Beaverlowe, and I don’t see any argu-

ments at the moment to convince her that they were not reasonable. Better let me tell the truth.'

'That I forbid, whatever happens. I will not bear to be made ridiculous.'

'But surely a mortal disease is not ridiculous.'

Mr. Beaver showed a dry irritation.

'I have remarked,' he said, 'that the sense of humour is not keen in your estimable character. Not ridiculous to preserve the semblance of a man when one is inspired, not by a soul, but by doctor's stuff! The spectacle is not funny, perhaps, but I know none more bitterly absurd.'

'Then death must be most ridiculous of all?'

'Under certain conditions which, please Heaven, will not befall me. When the moment comes, I hope it will be forced by some great excitement, when my horse and I fall together. Nobody will laugh

then. Nobody will recollect me in a night-cap. I shall die as I have lived, *totus* and *teres*. So you hope to fall by a bullet, like a soldier?’

‘I see all the more plainly that Grace ought to know this, Mr. Beaver.’

‘And I insist upon your silence towards her and towards everyone.’

‘I must submit, but in that case I can hardly serve you.’

‘I asked you to serve your cousin,’ said Mr. Beaver, rising.

With forebodings of evil, Dick approached the subject when an opportunity occurred next day. So soon as Grace understood that her quiet life was no passing annoyance, but the fate to be expected henceforth, she did not stay to hear arguments. Running to her husband’s study, she breathlessly announced an intention of returning the neighbours’ calls forthwith. He tried to dissuade her with promises and

gifts, as one diverts a child ; but her anger grew.

‘Wait till to-morrow, at least!’ Mr. Beaver urged at length, and since the day was wet Grace consented triumphantly.

After lunch on the morrow the gentlemen rode out, and she ordered a carriage. The servant returned to say that both coachmen had gone to Laystone by Mr. Beaver’s orders, and taken the key of the stables.

‘Break the door open!’ Grace cried, in full revolt; and she ran down to superintend, heedless of her aunt’s appeal. Her ponies had vanished; Mr. Beaver’s two grooms had accompanied their master, and the stable-boys could not find a livery.

‘Harness the blacks! I will drive myself,’ she cried—and did so.

But to call on the dignitaries of the county in this fashion lay beyond even her indignant courage, and after a long circuit she returned.

The gentlemen had already got back, and Mrs. Saxell, pale with agitation, told what had happened. /

‘An amusing freak of the child’s,’ said Mr. Beaver calmly.

‘I don’t think it a joke at all!’ Dick exclaimed.

‘No? I have already ventured to remark your deficiency in the sense of humour.’

‘If you will not tell Grace the truth, it is natural that a girl of her age and spirit should resent the lonely life you propose. I don’t blame her!’

‘I have not invited your opinion on my wife’s doings!’ he answered, with a dark look; and withdrew.

‘I don’t understand it,’ began Mrs. Saxell, in her most austere manner.

‘It’s easy to understand that there are going to be unpleasant scenes. It is too late for us to interfere. That should have been done before marriage.’

‘Who could have thought that Mr. Beaver would be so unreasonable!’

‘It is no good to discuss that now.’

‘Grace’s conduct was unladylike.’

‘You have known her since her birth. Will it be any use arguing with her?’

‘I almost fear it will not.’

‘Then let us shorten our visit and go to-morrow.’

‘Where to?’

‘Since we are here, to London. Hugh Acland should arrive in a few days.’

‘Perhaps it will be best.’

Grace entered.

‘We have been saying, my dear, that in your interest we had better leave you alone with Mr. Beaver for a time.’

She made no effort to keep them. Mrs. Saxell delivered a homily, which lasted at intervals till bedtime; Grace heard it without impatience, sitting stolid and sullen. Mr. Beaver showed perfect tact, treating his

wife with a grave and kindly deference which made her temper look brutal.

Before they went in the morning, Dick found an opportunity to say a few words of common-sense tenderly. Grace broke into tears.

‘I know what I have done now, and what is before me! He’s pitiless as a tiger, Dick! I’m afraid—of him and myself.’

‘Look at the other side, dear! Your husband is thoroughly kind and generous, a pleasant companion, brilliantly clever, large-minded even in his faults. What proportion of young wives who come and go as they please would not change places with you!’

‘But I am worth love, Dick, and I could give love! All that you name was offered me once, and love beside. I refused it, and he is avenged!’

A cab drove up to take them to the station. Grace opened her mouth to ex-

claim, at sight of that homely vehicle, but said nothing. Beaver whispered to Mrs. Saxell aside:

‘I regret to send you from my house in this respectable but unostentatious manner. The fact is, I have found it necessary to part with all my carriage-horses!’



CHAPTER VIII.

HUGH RETURNS.

PASS over the demonstrations of affection and delight which welcomed Hugh Acland home. Heartfelt as they were, a certain embarrassment possessed all the party; both mother and son were relieved when Edie left them after dinner, and the moment of explanation came.

‘I have something very grave to tell you,’ Hugh began, ‘which I would not write——’

‘You are married?’

He smiled.

‘If it isn’t so grave as that,’ Mrs. Acland continued, ‘let it rest till I have told you how the lawsuit stands——’

‘I am curious to know that.’

‘I have given way, Hugh!’

‘What can you mean? You acknowledge that Sergeant-Major Raikes was my father?’

‘It is proved conclusively. I did Mr. Beaver great injustice, for in declining to help us in the beginning he meant kindly. I can show you letters which Hugh wrote him from India. In short, we cannot dispute the evidence, and I thought my son would not wish to have his father’s indiscretions and his mother’s sad story told in public. Was I not right?’

‘Of course—under the conditions you mention. I begged you to yield when I believed them. And what has been done so far?’

‘I have undertaken in your name to sur-

render the personal property. We shall still be rich.'

'I must say at once that you have been precipitate, mother, though right in your point of view. Those letters which Mr. Beaver produces are forged. My father did not go to India, and he did not enlist.'

'What? You speak as if you knew!'

'He went to the West Coast, and there I have lived with him for months!'

'Hugh!'

'He took the name of Cutler, which the natives transformed into Kootlah. Now you understand.'

'That negro king was Hugh? Oh, where is he?'

'Dead, mother!'

'And you gave me no hint!'

'I did not know him till the last. On his death-bed he acknowledged me in the presence of Pringle and Holmes, and gave me his papers.'

‘ You have read them?’

‘ Yes.’

Pale and trembling, Mrs. Acland paused a moment.

‘ What is in them?’ she asked.

‘ Very little about his early life, mother—only an outline. I will bring them.’

When he returned Mrs. Acland had gone to her room, and he carried the papers to her.

‘ Good-night, my darling boy!’ she said; and Hugh was conscious that she sought his kiss with dumb anxiety, as if to learn from it whether his love and respect were still unchanged.

‘ Good-night, dearest mother!’ said he passionately, taking her in his arms.

Brother and sister sat long, talking of the past, exchanging explanations and confidences, before Hugh found courage to tell their father’s fate. But after the first outbreak of wonder and dismay, Edie listened

quietly, holding her brother's hand. When the tale was finished, she said:

‘I knew in my heart that the man who wrote to me from India was not my father. But sometimes I almost doubted——’

‘Raikes wrote from India?’

‘Yes, four years ago. I had just left school. Oh, what misery I suffered!’

‘You told no one?’

‘I could not speak of it—how could I? The charges were so vile against mamma, and he claimed to be our father. I think, Hugh, that I have never been the same since that letter.’

‘What fiendish hatred! I don’t ask what the charges were, dear. They were false as himself. We may forget them now.’

‘Yes,’ she answered, but without spirit. ‘I think I will say good-night now, my dearest brother.’

‘There is something,’ he said, as they

stood hand in hand. 'You have not mentioned Miss Palliser all this time. She is married?'

'She has married Mr. Beaver, dear.'

'Well! Good-night, my tender little Edie!'

Next day Mrs. Acland came down very late.

'You have read it all?' asked Hugh.

'All that you gave me. Was there no more?'

'No more, I vow.'

After a long silence Mrs. Acland murmured:

'Did he speak of me, Hugh?'

'Hardly. It was so sudden and so awful that neither of us could collect our thoughts.'

'He did speak? You asked him for a word for me? Did he beg your forgiveness and mine?'

'No, mother!'

‘Did he speak of forgiveness? Did he say he forgave *me*?’

‘No!’

‘I am glad he spared himself that mockery on his death-bed! He said he did not forgive me?’

‘I hope I misunderstood him, mother! You torture me and yourself with this questioning! It will be less painful to tell you how my father died, though that is a terrible story.’

‘No, no! I do not wish to hear! It was a violent death?’

‘Assassination!’

‘Poor Hugh—poor Hugh! He often said that a man should die in battle! Let us never speak of this again—it makes me faint! Poor Hugh! Was he happy in his savage kingdom, do you think?’

‘I must own, mother, that he seemed quite happy. Danger and plotting and fighting were his element.’

‘ Yes, Hugh found the life that suited his character ! It was not the fault of either that we were miserable, perhaps. You see that now, Hugh ?’

‘ I see it, mother !’

‘ He knew you or guessed who you were at the first meeting ?’

‘ I suppose so.’

‘ And said nothing ? No feeling betrayed him ?’

‘ It is likely that he was forewarned. His correspondents at Cape Coast Castle may have reported that we were travelling up the country.’

‘ But you lived with him for months. He saw his son at the point of death, and made no sign ?’

‘ Indeed I have thought of all this, mother ! It is distressing to dwell upon.’

‘ I have an object. Hugh refused to forgive me ! Remember what sort of man it was who dared to speak so of his wife

when dying—a secret, violent, suspicious, brooding, treacherous man, Hugh !’

‘Oh, let us forget all this now! He is dead !’

‘But he left ’an accusation behind! I appeal to my son and his to judge between us! Me you have known from your earliest recollections—him you know now! Look into my eyes, Hugh, and say which you believe—the mother who suffered and held her peace, or the father who outraged and deserted and calumniated her?’

‘You, a thousand times, my dear, dear mother! I have never doubted you; but I know also that my father was betrayed by those scoundrels, Hardwicke and Beaver. They caused the trouble between you, and one at least has put himself in my hands. I have to ask an explanation of Mr. Beaver.’

‘What explanation?’

‘He has brought himself within the law

at last, I hope. Those forged letters deal with a title to property, and they are criminal. I shall take a legal opinion, and if it be what I hope, he shall be prosecuted.'

'But Hugh! what grievance have you against Mr. Beaver?'

'I say he was the cause of all your troubles, and in the second generation he still tries to do us injury. I will avenge my father, and you, and myself, if it be possible.'

'Wait, dear! Don't do anything rash. Promise that you will consult me at every step.'

'I will do that, but my mind is made up——'

A footman announced Major and Mrs. Saxell.

'Tell them I will be down instantly,' said Hugh. 'They have come for their money, perhaps. It would be a good scene if I was a clever actor.'

‘Don’t see them, Hugh, I implore you!’

‘Why? I will be gentle as a dove, you may be sure, mother. They only want a trifle of cash which does not belong to them. These are honest people. I will bear it in mind.’

‘Heedless of entreaty he left the room, and Mrs. Acland sat stunned, confusedly revolving the peril. Then she ran to the bell—but no one came for a few minutes. In that time the mischief had been done.

‘Allow me to shake hands without introduction,’ said Dick cheerfully, ‘and to congratulate you on your return, Mr. Acland!’

Hugh submitted in silence.

‘I heartily join in that congratulation,’ said Mrs. Saxell; adding politely, with a glance at his black clothes, ‘I trust that you have found no loss in your circle.’

‘I am in mourning for my father, madam.’

‘Indeed!’ she ejaculated in astonishment.

‘It was very sad—he died in my son’s arms.’

‘Pardon me. The person who died in your son’s arms was Sergeant-Major Raikes of the Artillery.’

‘What is this, sir? But I see you have not yet been informed of the discoveries made in your absence.’

‘On the contrary, I am aware of those and of much more. My father died three months ago on the West Coast of Africa.’

‘Control yourself, mother!’ cried Dick, but it was useless.

‘We have had much more than enough of this!’ Mrs. Saxell cried roughly. ‘It is not to be supposed that because we have overlooked your mother’s conduct——’

‘For Heaven’s sake!’ Dick cried, in pain and shame.

‘What conduct do you refer to, madam?’

‘Probably Mrs. Acland has not told you that she is convicted of suborning

perjurers, sir; men who swore that Raikes was not her husband but somebody else. Oh, she confessed it, for we had the proofs! And you—you bring forward another tale! It's too much! You want law, and you shall have it, with police as well.'

'Come away, mother!' Dick exclaimed, passionately seizing her.

'Fine feelings he must have when his first word is another falsehood!' But Mrs. Saxell was more impressed than she would admit by Hugh's sudden faltering. He roused himself to ask in a changed voice:

'You had evidence besides Mr. Beaver's letters, Major Saxell?'

'I know nothing of Mr. Beaver's letters,' said Dick. 'Believe me, I regret this painful scene more deeply than I could tell. If you will allow me a few moments' talk when we are calmer, I might do something

to remove the distress you are suffering. I am heartily glad you have found proof which ends this deplorable controversy.'

Mrs. Saxell was roused again.

'Speak for yourself, Richard! I can feel for this young man, if he is really deceived; but——'

A maid entered.

'Mrs. Acland is taken suddenly ill, sir,' she said to Hugh, 'and begs you to go to her room.'

'No wonder!' exclaimed Mrs. Saxell, before the door closed. 'Your story comes a little too late, sir! I have received ten thousand pounds——'

Dick took her forcibly by her arm, his face set, pale as in battle, and drew her out. In astonishment and alarm she submitted.

Hugh went upstairs mechanically. Edie sat beside her mother, who sprang up, her eyes feverishly questioning.

‘Well? What has passed? You were gentle with him!’

‘I will send a doctor, mother!’ said Hugh, and turned.

‘I am not so ill! Those people have said something that disturbs you! Tell me the worst!’

‘Do I know it, mother?’

He went out, but Edie swiftly followed, and drew him into her own room.

‘I guess what you have heard, brother,’ she whispered. ‘Come back at once.’

‘Did you know it? Is it true?’

‘Our mother has been weak and wrong, but she is the truest and tenderest of mothers to us. You must bear with her, Hugh, as I have, remembering what she has gone through. All the world will accuse, but her children must comfort. Come back at once!’

‘But is it true? Have you nothing in excuse?’

‘Oh, do not argue, but come to her! I know all you could say! I have suffered for years! Oh, don’t hesitate, or you may mourn it in vain as long as you live!’

‘What is it you fear?’

‘Everything dreadful—— Must I speak out? She may kill herself!’

He gasped incredulously. Edie’s face was stamped with the horror of her thought, and Hugh ran back, fell on his knees beside the chair where his mother sat dully gazing, and cried:

‘Whatever has happened my love is the same! Nothing shall ever shake it, mother!’

She dropped her head upon his shoulder.

‘You do not know yet. Bless you for that word, Hugh; but will you repeat it when I have told you all?’

‘I will repeat it daily and hourly. We are going to take up our life just where we left it, in cheerfulness and love. I refuse

to hear anything, or to remember anything, or to touch this business again. And to that I solemnly take a vow.'

Mrs. Acland had found a relief at once, and her tears flowed easily and happily.

'My dear, dear son! I thought I was acting for the best——'

'I will have no explanation!' Hugh cried, in shocked bewilderment. 'We love each other, and that is enough. This afternoon I will make arrangements to convince those people that they are mistaken.'

Mrs. Acland's maid entered.

'Major Saxell begs to see you, sir.'

'Don't go! It can do no good,' Edie cried.

'You are right. Beg Major Saxell, with my compliments, to excuse me.'

The maid withdrew.

'No!' exclaimed Mrs. Acland. 'Let Edie go!'

'Mamma!'

'It would be kinder. Pray see him, dear.'

‘I cannot! How could you propose it, mamma?’

‘Well,’ said Hugh, ‘it’s too late by this time!’

‘How very distressed the poor fellow will be!’ sighed Mrs. Acland.

Edie hesitated another second; then hurried downstairs, very red but resolved. Dick was just leaving the house.

‘I hope Hugh’s message was delivered correctly?’

‘It was very good of him. Mrs. Acland is not seriously unwell, I trust?’

‘Only upset. You will call again?’

‘It will be a farewell visit which I could not refuse myself. I am recalled, and I start on Saturday.’

‘Oh, I had forgotten that wretched India! Must you go?’ She led the way to the breakfast-room. ‘I can hardly believe that we are going to lose our only friend just when Hugh comes back. Will it be for long?’

‘Many years, I am afraid. But a time has come which you fixed. Your mother has escaped her troubles, and her son has returned. You promised to answer me then?’

‘Our troubles are not over,’ she murmured. ‘I have no answer.’

‘You can see the end of them. There is little difference between to-day and to-morrow, except that I shall be so much nearer the parting.’ She was silent. ‘You thought the time fixed would never come?’

‘I feared not,’ she whispered, and Dick suddenly stretched out his arms to clasp her. But the sad fixity of Edie’s eyes checked him. ‘I fear not still!—Mamma will be grieved. Give us as much time as you can, but do not speak of this again.’

‘That is impossible, Edie!’

‘Then say good-bye now, for I could not bear it.’

‘No, I consent, trusting to your goodness. Oh, Edie, I have such a little while with you, and India is so far!’

‘I do not forget that,’ she answered sadly. ‘Till this evening!’

Mrs. Saxell, meantime, deserted by her son, had driven to the lawyer. She had no doubt at all that Hugh’s tale was another fraud, and urged her adviser to do something—anything, to secure her full rights at once. He vainly pointed out that she had no rights for the present; but at length a communication was sent to Mr. Gorman, inviting him to state what Mrs. Acland proposed to do in settlement of the claim. The answer arrived within twenty-four hours. The evidence of his father’s life and death in West Africa was deposited by Mr. Hugh Acland at Mr. Gorman’s office for inspection, and a copy would be supplied immediately.

Mrs. Saxell began to be alarmed, not by

the thought that Hugh's story might be true, but by the suspicion that it might be too well concocted. Dick absolutely refused to give advice beyond counselling her to pay back the money forthwith. The indignant scorn which greeted this proposal made it easier, as more pleasant, for him to spend as much time with Edie as propriety and good feeling allowed. Mrs. Acland had told Hugh how matters stood between those two, so far as she possessed the information. He did not approve, but he liked Dick; Saturday was very near, India very far. So Hugh made his guest welcome.

A trouble arose over Yini and Juma which no one had anticipated. When, with great delicacy, and an embarrassment that grew as Mrs. Acland's face darkened, Hugh told of their existence, for the first time since he could recollect he saw his mother in a passion. She would not hear of them, blamed Hugh severely for bringing them

home, declared it an insult to herself. She forbade him to undertake any sort of charge; if that were an implied condition of his share in their father's property, Mrs. Acland insisted that he should give it up. Hugh had high principle and sensitive feelings, as such qualities go, but his system of ethics was distinctly moulded by the influences of the day. Without consciously admitting that the existence of these children was a circumstance natural and therefore excusable, he thought his mother foolish as well as unkind for objecting. No practical difficulty arose, however. A rich maiden aunt of Pringle's was overjoyed to receive the children. In deference to his mother's feeling, Hugh abandoned without regret his third of their large fortune, but he would not abandon the guardianship in concert with Pringle and Bob Holmes.

Dick resolutely kept his last day for his

mother, and bade Edie good-bye on the Friday night. Not a hint of question had he let fall until she stood with her hand in his for the last time, and no word on her lips.

‘Will you let me go thus?’ he whispered.

‘If a word will comfort you I will say it, but that is all.’

‘The word that would comfort me means all that makes life worth having! Say it then, Edie!’

She murmured, drooping her head:

‘I love you!’

‘I am content now. Earth has no more to offer. In your own time, Edie, you will say more, will you not?’

‘How can I, when you are going away for years!’

She broke into sobs.

‘Can you not bring yourself to write, darling?—For both our sakes?’

‘I will, Dick—every mail.’

‘And presently will you say that all your hesitations are past—that I may come home to claim you?’

‘They will never pass! We can never be more to each other than now!’

Despair caught him, more cruel for his late joy. To argue was impossible.

‘Darling,’ he whispered, ‘I think I understand; but give me a sign. You fear that Hugh will not forgive your mother when he comes to know all?’

She sobbed.

‘He will abandon us, as our father did! —No, I do not mean that,’ shuddering. ‘You will not ask me also to desert mamma? I never could — not even for you!’

‘I will not ask you, but we cannot limit the mercy of Heaven! And there is something more, Edie—I know that. Your tender conscience feels the weight of wrong..

doing in which you had no share. Hugh will relent presently—I am patient, and you are young. When that happens, remember what I tell you now—that I guessed the truth long ago, and loved you and revered you all the more. Then, will you not recall me?’

‘If the time should ever come, Dick, I will.’

‘That is a promise, and on it I rest, love, with a good hope.’

By the mail next night, Dick started for India, without another interview. Mrs. Saxell forgot all her grievances in that hour, and wept over her son with yearning love. He also forgot every memory that might have jarred at the parting; but he looked eagerly among the crowd. And presently his eye distinguished a veiled figure in black, standing beside a young man lean and sunburnt. On the impulse of the moment, Dick ran to them.

‘I knew you would come to cheer me at the last! Thank you, Edie! Mr. Acland, I shall never fail to recollect your kindness in escorting her!’

He had but just time to press their hands.

When Dick had gone, the brother and sister returned to their carriage in silence.

‘Put me down at the Rhadamanthus,’ said Hugh to the coachman.

‘Won’t you dine with us?’ Edie asked.

‘No, dear! I called for you this evening because I had promised. I must tell you, Edie, that I went to Beaverlowe to-day, and saw that man.’

‘Ha! Is that the reason you will not come home?’

‘Yes. Perhaps you know or suspect what he told me—and proved? If not, I shall not say. Don’t argue, Edie—don’t appeal! I love our mother still, and I pity her, but I can’t forgive—not yet! I have

not had time to think ; but in the morning I shall go to Worstan, and you will hear from me.'

The carriage stopped.

'Oh, Hugh, this will kill mamma with grief!'

'No, darling! I understand our poor mother better now. If I allowed myself to be persuaded, I could not always restrain my feeling, and then—— Good-night, my dear, dear sister! I leave an angel to comfort and console her!'

Edie submitted, having foreseen this, and knowing that opposition would but inflame a wound that Time alone could heal. The sorrow of Dick's departure was forgotten in this keener and more pressing trouble. To hide her passionate despair lay beyond Edie's art, and Mrs. Acland easily drew out the secret. Though bitterly painful, the revelation was no surprise. She had been aware that of necessity Hugh was learning

various matters, though he tried to fulfil his promise and ignore the past. The lawyers, of course, would not suppress any information they had, and Beaver, she knew, would instantly use the weapon of defence she had provided. Mrs. Acland had seen her son grow daily colder and more preoccupied. It was almost a relief when the worst befell. She collected herself, when the first outbreak of grief was past, and began to revolve the means of bringing Hugh to forgiveness.

He meanwhile had found no acquaintance in the morning-room of the Rhadamanthus, and took the paper which a servant was just laying on the table. A heading in large type caught his eye. He read the paragraph in feverish excitement. A friend came up and greeted him ; but Hugh started away, found a Bradshaw, and looked out the trains to Laystone. He was just in time to catch the last. A great fear possessed him. At

midnight he reached his destination, and found the report too true.

That morning Hugh Acland had travelled the same line on his way to Beaverlowe. What were his intentions he could not have said. The wrongs of two generations fired him; but above all, he was racked with jealousy of the man who secured Grace Palliser. This youth was not more dignified as a hero, nor more submissive as a Christian, than the rest of us.

Mr. Beaver received him at once, bowed smilingly, and motioned him to a chair without speaking; when Hugh paid no heed, he rose and leaned upon the mantel, quietly observant.

‘Here is the receipt, sir, for the money you lent my mother. Having repaid it, I wish to ask some questions.’

‘It was not necessary to take so much trouble,’ Mr. Beaver answered, curling the receipt between his fingers, ‘but I am the more complimented.’

‘Why did you lend it?’

‘Because my wife asked me,’ he replied, without a trace of surprise.

‘That was not your motive.’

‘Indeed! Well, perhaps I had some kindly feeling towards Mrs. Acland.’

‘That’s a falsehood!’

Beaver started and flushed, but he said pleasantly:

‘I stand open to correction. What was my motive?’

‘To finish the work begun when you ruined my father. I am going to prosecute you, Mr. Beaver!’

‘That’s rather grave! I have almost a right, perhaps, to ask what for?’

‘For the two letters you furnished to my mother purporting to come from India. Broken hearts and shattered homes and disgraced lives are not to be avenged at law, but for the attempt to divert money from the rightful heirs there is justice.

And you shall be brought to the dock, Mr. Beaver.'

'I am interested in your story. Pray suppress the embroidery, Mr. Acland, and let me understand the prosaic facts. I gave certain letters to your mother, purporting to come from India. Have you got them?'

'No. But I mean to have them!'

'Well, if you succeed in getting possession of that correspondence, I would venture to advise you to put it in the fire as quickly as possible and say no more about it.'

'What do you mean?'

'I was not afraid of your father, sir, and much less should I be afraid of you. He assaulted me unprepared, but you will not have that advantage. Listen, and take a brief hint. I have never heard of those letters.'

'You also accuse my mother!' Hugh cried, stepping forward, his hands clenched and his eyes aflame.

Mr. Beaver drooped suddenly, catching at the mantel-board; but he raised himself on the instant, though pale and changed.

‘It was not my intention,’ he said, ‘to end this curious conversation so abruptly, but circumstances are our masters.’ Moving slowly to his desk, he brought out a paper. ‘Of the matters you refer to I know nothing, but this document may throw light upon them.’

‘MY DEAR MRS. ACLAND,

‘The object you propose seems to be harmless. It is neither my business nor my wish to know what steps you will take, and I am willing to let you use my name. But you distinctly understand that I am influenced only by friendship, and I refuse all risk. If the means you choose threaten to bring me into difficulties or scandal, I shall produce this note, which I beg you to endorse.

‘JULIUS BEAVER.’

‘The case seems to have arisen,’ continued Mr. Beaver. ‘You will observe that Mrs. Acland quite provided against it.

Dumb with horror, Hugh read :

‘MY DEAR MR. BEAVER,

‘I understand the condition, and I accept it implicitly.

‘MARGARET ACLAND.’

‘I think that these notes will relieve us from the necessity of further explanation. I beg you to let your mother know that I used them most unwillingly. Good-morning.’

He rang.

‘This is another forgery! When I have proved it to be such, you will hear of me again with——’

‘I shall be pleased.—Graham,’ he added to the servant, ‘I am always at home to this gentleman.’

Hugh was stunned. He had not the

slightest doubt that Beaver was speaking truth, and his only conscious feeling was eagerness to hide his shame.

When he had hurried out, Mr. Beaver's valet entered.

'Thompson is to take the horses round now, sir,' he said.

'Let him wait two minutes.'

The man hesitated, looking at his master curiously, as though alarmed by something unusual in his air ; but at an angry glance he left the room. Beaver carefully poured himself some drops of mixture, arranged his dress, and followed.

To dispose of the carriage-horses was effectual, in the sense that it put a stop to Grace's project of visiting her neighbours, but in no other. It stirred the reckless spirit of the girl like a challenge, to be taken up in any lawful manner.

The riding-horses had not been sold, and she called out her groom at all sorts of

hours, in all sorts of weather. Beaver made no objection, and he accompanied his wife so often that her lonely rides did not look odd. His manner remained the same, admiring, caressing, humorous sometimes, always quaint. Whatever traps Grace laid, however sudden her movements, he was always at the hall-door to lift her into the saddle if his own horse was not paraded. She never could enjoy the satisfaction of escaping without her husband's knowledge and declared approval. This irritated her sadly. And when they rode together no caprice disturbed his even temper. It is difficult to keep up an easy flow of talk when one party in the *tête-à-tête* refuses to bear her proportion, but Beaver was equal to this also. If Grace proved really sullen, which was uncommon, he delivered a bright little essay upon any subject that came uppermost, illustrated by odd learning and caustic observations. So interesting were

they that she could not forbear to listen, and so amusing that she often laughed. The mischief had not gone very deep.

But the announcement that Dick's leave was shortened brought on a crisis. Grace longed to bid him good-bye, to tell her griefs, and ask sympathy. But her manner of begging permission was not conciliatory. Beaver was sorry to refuse, but she almost challenged him to do so, and, besides, he was really afraid to escort her to town. It is injudicious for an elderly man, afflicted with heart disease, to marry; but if he does such a foolish thing, he should choose a bride who will not disturb his calm ways of life. From this rule of prudence Beaver had gone astray almost as widely as he could, and the natural consequences followed. Alarming symptoms warned him of mischief which his wife did not in the least suspect.

The notice had been so short, and Dick had so much to do, that he could not run

down to Beaverlowe. When Grace learned this definitely, she came to a resolve, sent a portmanteau to Laystone Station, and ordered her horse at a minute's notice. This was on Friday, and whilst she put on her habit Hugh was holding his conference with Mr. Beaver. Of his visit Grace knew nothing. She had many reasons, not all selfish, for hoping that her husband would not be warned this time; but when the horses appeared his was there, and he joined her in the hall. Beaver stood a second, talking kindly and brightly, before they mounted, and then suddenly called the groom to help her to the saddle—a service which he had jealously kept for himself hitherto.

Grace did not change her resolution, but it was real kindness which led her to say, before they had gone a hundred yards:

‘I am sure you are not well, Julius. Had you not better return?’

‘Thank you, dear; not unless you wish it.’

‘I do wish it.’

‘Then give the word, and we will return for a quiet evening.’

‘I can go on alone.’

‘Very well. This ride will clear my complexion, if you are distressed about that.’

‘I want to ride fast.’

‘Then we shall be home sooner. It is but a little way, if you do not propose to go beyond Laystone.’

‘Perhaps I do. Why do you mention Laystone?’

‘You sent a portmanteau to the station this morning, I think? And it seemed possible that the fact had some connection with your ride.’

‘Do the servants report my doings to you?’

‘They report their own, dear, that’s all!’

She reined up and faced him, all her sympathy gone.

‘I am going to bid my cousin good-bye, Mr. Beaver. You refused to take me when I asked like an obedient wife, and now I shall go like a disobedient slave! Expect me back by the last train.’

‘Absolutely and superbly divine!’ he muttered, eyeing her passionate face. ‘What futile inexperience it shows to say that blonde beauty loses refinement under the extravagance of anger!—Let me beg of you, Grace, to give up this notion!’

‘It is much too late. You have shown the way you mean to treat me, and I shall show you as clearly that I will not submit to it. You should have taken the precautions Turks do before trying to manage your wife like a Turk. I am free, in the open country, mounted on one of your own horses, and the whole English army could not catch me.’

‘Indeed, I can hardly believe that such a perfect creature is mine!’ he murmured to himself. Then aloud, smiling, ‘I shall not call out the British army, dear, unless you ask me. In that case it shall be done, of course ; and if the British army does not obey, it will be no fault of mine.’

‘You guessed I was going to London?’

‘It occurred to me that the whim was not impossible.’

‘And how do you propose to stop me?’

She drew her horse aside, and made him plunge, as if to show alike her skill and his spirit.

‘Believe me, I am distressed to interfere with any caprice of yours.’

‘What have you done?’

‘With the utmost regret, I detained your portmanteau, dear.’

‘Let me understand. Is that all?’

‘Quite all.’

‘Is it possible you think I dare not travel in a habit?’

‘It was a pleasing fashion in its day,’ he said, complacently. ‘My grandmother always wore a habit when she paid visits in a carriage. She was married in a habit. But the uneducated would stare very unpleasantly nowadays.’

‘And you really think that a woman would be afraid of vulgar stares when she had made up her mind to do something? Your taste is too refined, Julius, to be a safe guide in dealing with ordinary mortals. You shall see.’

She dashed off full gallop, and Beaver, shocked, astounded, afraid that the horse would bolt if he heard hoofs clattering behind, reined in for a moment. When he gave chase the fugitive had a long start. Two miles were covered at a headlong gallop, and then, in the vista of a straight lane, appeared the level crossing, by Lay-

stone Station. The near gates were closed, but Grace did not see, or her horse had broken out of hand. Wildly Beaver and his groom shouted to the gate-keeper. Though she had half a mile before her, it was passed in a moment, and still the high gates stood fast, barring the road. Beaver saw his wife borne up to them at a furious pace—the wood flew—he dropped in a heap from the saddle.

But the gates were unfastened, and Grace burst through with a scream, sped across the rails, and vanished on the other side. She passed the station, and a few hundred yards beyond; then the frightened horse submitted. Though horror-stricken at the instant, Grace would not seem to give way. She cantered back looking for her husband, and prepared upon due apologies to return with him. But no one appeared when the porter came to hold her horse. Leisurely,

then, she took her ticket and went on to the platform.

The crossing lay well in sight, two hundred yards up the line; a man there was vehemently signalling to a group of navvies further on. The people of the station watched with some excitement, and Grace joined them.

‘What is the matter?’ she asked.

‘Looks to me, m’m,’ answered a porter, ‘as though there’d bin a accident in the lane!’

‘Run at once and see!’ she cried, in vague but awful alarm. ‘Run!’

‘The train’s due, m’m. But there’s something up for sure, for William hasn’t shut his gates, and we’ll have another accident if he ain’t sharp.’

The navvies had been approaching, and they suddenly ran down the lane, whilst the keeper shut his gates. At the same moment

the train whistled, and all was bustle on the platform.

‘ You are going to London, Mrs. Beaver?’ asked the stationmaster, touching his cap. ‘ That is your train. You had a narrow escape just now, m’m !’

‘ What has happened at the crossing ?’

‘ I will go and see when the train has left. No luggage, m’m ?’

‘ Oh, I can’t go till I know what it is.’

While Grace stood thus in distraction, she saw the navvies reappear, carrying a burden shoulder high. They waited outside until the gates should be thrown open. Vague was her glimpse of the scene, but it filled Grace with dread and agony. She leapt off the platform, a yard before the starting train, and ran towards it.

‘ Is he dead ? Oh, my poor husband !’

In embarrassment they looked to the groom, who held his master’s head, and did not speak. She tore at the barrier, shaking

it, whilst the man in charge drew the bolt with faltering hands. Grace rushed through, but that still figure daunted her, and she stood with wide eyes.

‘Aye, Mrs. Beaver!’ the groom said passionately, ‘with your airs and tricks, you’ve killed the best man and the kindest master on this country-side!’



ENVOI.

EDIE'S LETTER.

'May 4, 1884.

'**D**EAR MAJOR SAXELL,

'I am more than sorry to learn by your last letter that you have not received mine. The news I gave was all so monotonously dull that it is painful to repeat it, and I have no better to add about ourselves. Hugh still persists in refusing to live with us, and mamma has aged sadly under the distress. You know all our affairs, and I am so well assured of your sympathy that I can write to you as I might talk to my brother if he would

hear me. Mamma did wrong, but she has paid bitterly ; and is it for her son to punish her ?

‘ I have just seen Mrs. Saxell, who called with Grace whilst I was writing. Your mother looks better in health and spirits than when I saw her such a long time ago. You know, of course, that they have been living abroad since Mr. Beaver’s death. Grace is royally beautiful, but graver than I ever thought she could become. She declares she can never forget Mrs. Saxell’s kindness and sympathy in the time of her troubles; but your mother cannot resist home-sickness any longer, and they are going to Scarsholme for a while at least.

‘ You will not be surprised to hear that Grace contemplates this prospect with a little dismay, though she only admits so much to me in confidence. Mamma was present, lying on her sofa, and she brightened

into something of her old spirits as we talked. I must tell you gratefully that Mrs. Saxell was most considerate. She spoke of Hugh, whom they met abroad; I thought Grace was just a little interested when his name was mentioned, and mamma grew excited, of course. She begged them to pay us a visit this season, and they promised to come next month. You can fancy mamma's delight. She hopes that Hugh will not resist that temptation when we know how he is longing to forgive and to be forgiven. If he only saw mamma there would be an end of our troubles. But the poor dear fellow is well aware of that, and he is obstinate. How we shall love Grace if she brings us together!

‘By-the-bye, you know Captain Holmes, whom everybody calls Bob? He is on leave, and Hugh told Grace that he wants to marry Yini. I have never seen her, but everyone declares her charming: scarcely

sixteen yet, but quite a woman. Her brother, Juma, is to enter the service.

‘I must tell you something curious and painful that occurred the other day. A very old lady called and sent up her name as Mrs. Hardwicke. Fortunately, as things turned out, mamma was not so well, and James reported to me. I saw her. It was a distressing interview. If she had heard what was going on in those dreadful days past, or we had discovered her existence, what misery would have been spared us! It was Hardwicke’s mother. Somebody told her a few days ago that we had been inquiring for his friends, and she came as soon as she could. I questioned the poor old creature cautiously. She knew her son’s enlistment under the name of Raikes, though he had never communicated with her afterwards. And she knew also how he hated mamma. She told me, weeping bitterly, that it was a terrible relief when

he went away, for she had lived in fear that her son would be tempted into some awful crime by jealousy. What a fiendish spirit his must have been! Our father, Hugh says, was very keen and suspicious; Mr. Beaver was hard and bright as a diamond; mamma has the cleverest and quickest intelligence I ever met; but Hardwicke deceived them all. He served in the Artillery twenty years, and passed for a quiet, good-tempered soldierly comrade. The revelation of such a man's true character, by accident as it were, suggests horrid thoughts, which I cannot quite master. I fancy your calm, convincing tone in analyzing the facts, but I cannot fancy your arguments. It would be a comfort to hear them, for I am painfully bewildered.

‘May 5.

‘In beginning this letter I said all our news was miserable, but to-day it is all

glad. I was sitting with mamma when James called me out, and led me in mysterious silence to the breakfast-room. Hugh was there! You are able to imagine the joy of that meeting after two years. We had written so constantly that there was nothing new to tell, but you know that he would not let me plead with him to return. Fancy how I broke out at this opportunity! No praying was needed, however. Hugh had come to ask forgiveness, and he was almost as deeply moved as I. As soon as I could trust my face I went back to prepare mamma, but her quick eyes read it at a glance. "My boy is here!" she cried, and hurried to the door, calling Hugh. I supported her, and cried too. Then he ran in, and I left them in each other's arms.

'Hugh slept in his old room last night, and he will live with us again just like old times—no, not just like, for we are all

changed ; but not to be less happy, I trust, after this chastening.

‘And now, Dick, I keep my promise. Come home!’

THE END.



